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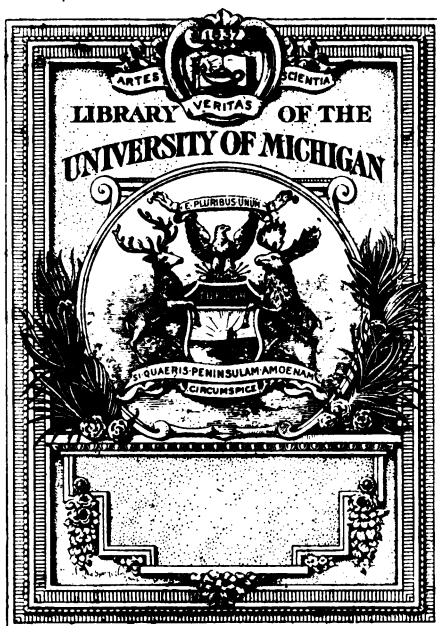
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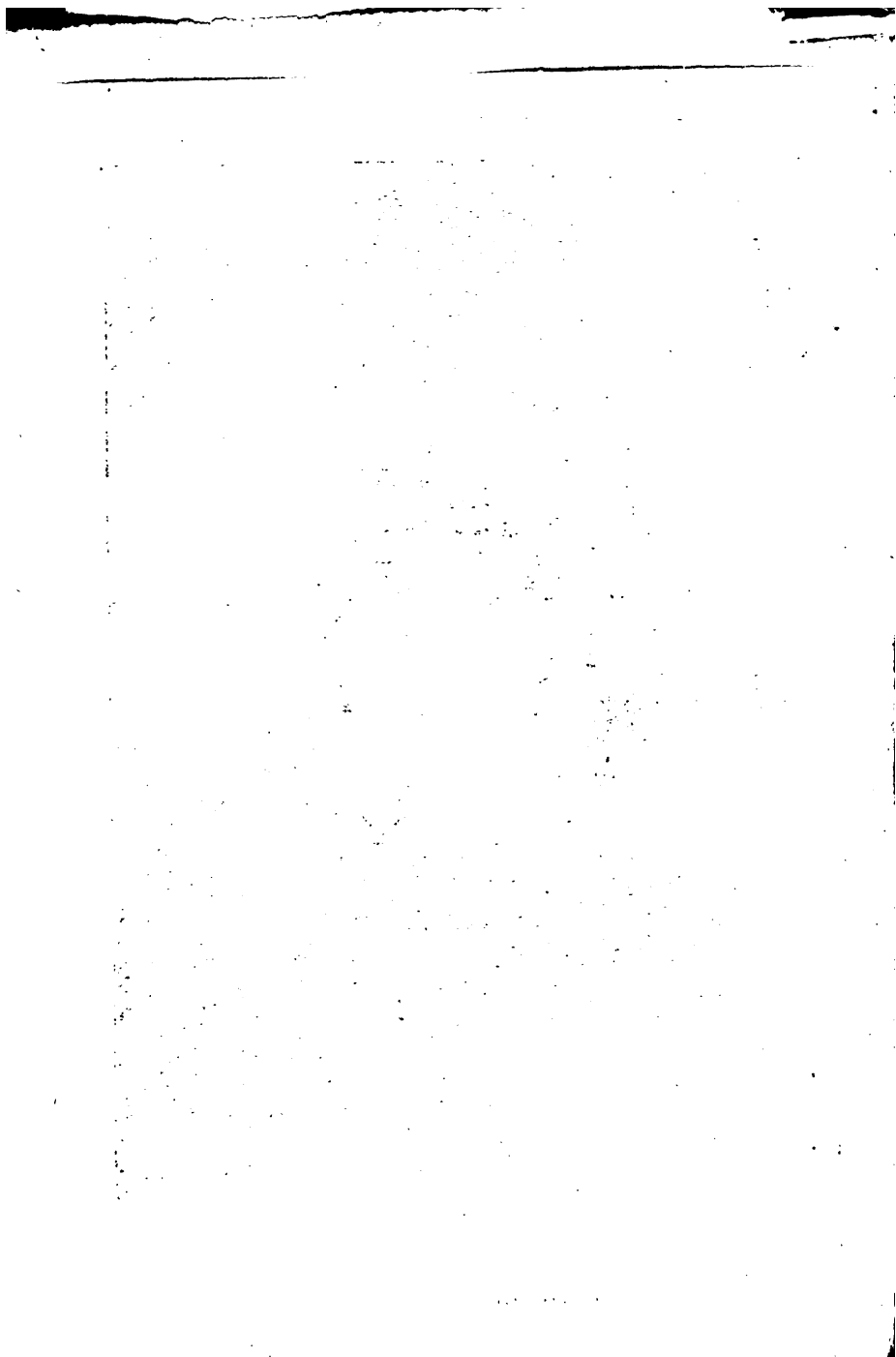


FATMA.

(From a Sketch by Jean-Léon Gérôme.)

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THE FAYOUM
OR
ARTISTS IN EGYPT

BY

PAUL LENOIR



ILLUSTRATED WITH THIRTEEN PLATES

HENRY S. KING & Co.

65, CORNHILL & 12 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

1873

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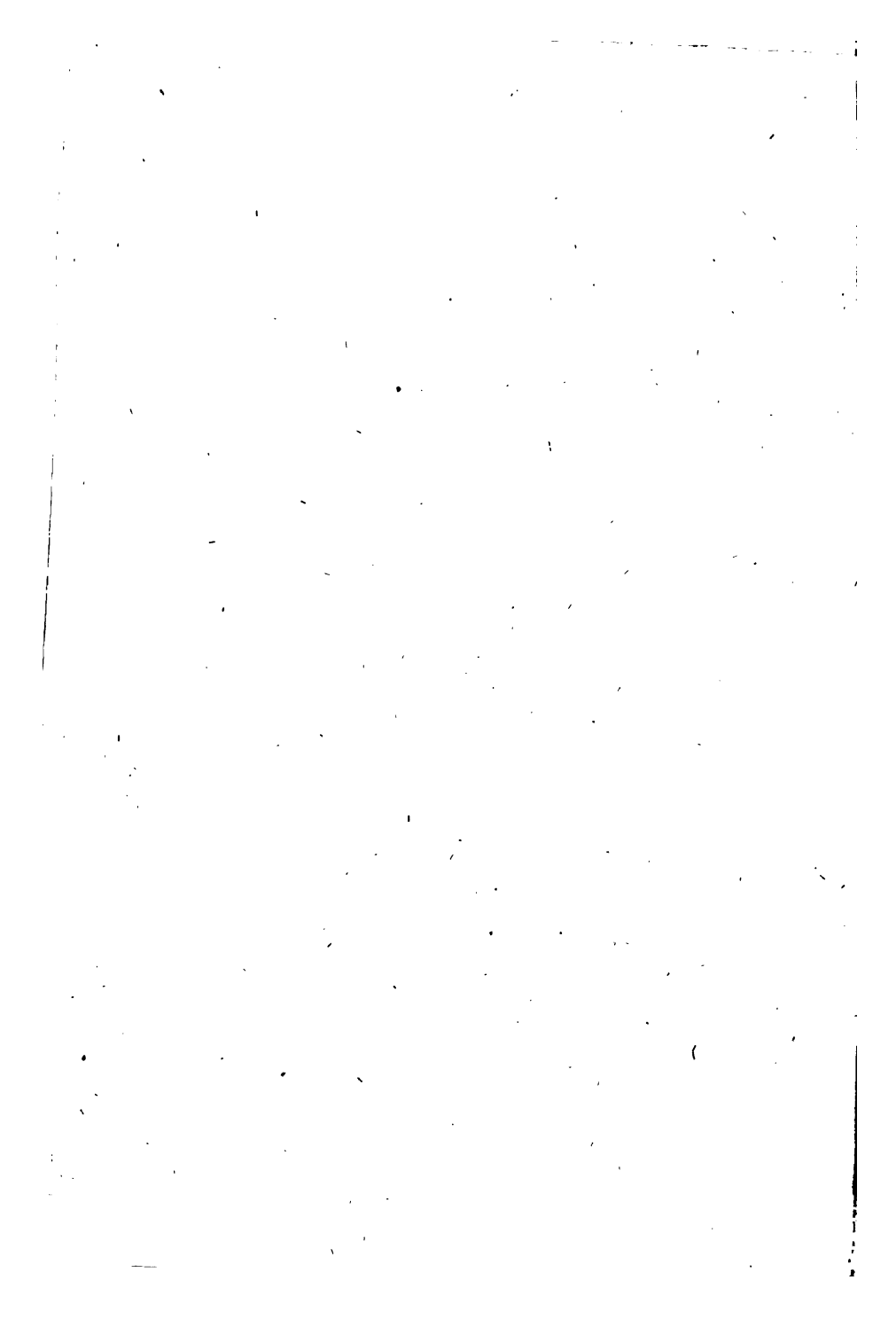
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THE FAYOUM
OR
ARTISTS IN EGYPT.

PART I.

SKETCH I.

OUR PLAN.

Our Luggage and Ourselves.

IF RAMESIS had reckoned upon us to make an inventory of his pylones, or to set the catalogue of his ancestors right, he would have been grossly cheated. We set out with a deliberate intention of ingratitude towards the Ptolemies, and we should have considered ourselves ill-used if, in order to paint the Pyramids, we had been obliged to reckon their strata.

Our object in going to Egypt was to look out for subjects for pictures, and to paint them. We did not pretend to see everything, but we wished to see

thoroughly, and to paint the truth of everything we were to see. Thus, cobalt blue and dry collodion played a much more important part in our equipment than flannel and antidotes. Our chief solicitude was that our supply of paints should not fall short; for though we did not despise the hunting we expected to have, or any other amusement, our colour-box was of far greater importance than our weapons of destruction.

The younger members of our party attached a ridiculous importance to their luggage, which was heavy in proportion to the inexperience of its owners. For my part, I had to send back to Paris a collection of useless things with which I had laden my trunks on the sage excuse that I was going into the Desert. Into a country where one cannot want anything, it is absurd to take anything. Each of us thought he had nothing but the merest necessities with him, and yet we looked as if the Pyramids themselves were following us.

SKETCH II.

*FROM THE LYONS RAILWAY-STATION TO
CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLES.*

'STOP!' cried a man in a turban, whom we had taken on board at Messina as a pilot ; thus announcing at the same time the end of a tedious passage and the rising of the curtain before the great fairy scene called a voyage in the East. But the curtain did not rise all at once ; a thick mist obscured the horizon after a most disobliging and inhospitable fashion. The sun made us wait for him, like a king who desires to dazzle his guests by the splendour of his long-expected presence—sending up innumerable flashes along the horizon, until at length his disc became completely visible above the water.

Then we saw the coast of Africa, like a long gilded straw, floating in the distance. Our imagination outstripped the ship. We vied with each other in perceiving the imperceptible. 'Do you see this?' 'Do you see that?' 'Those are palm-trees!' 'No,

they are camels.' 'Not at all; they are windmills.' Thus we talked in our excitement. On that morning our little party were more restless than usual, and the horrible noise of the boiler was nothing in comparison with the exclamations of joyous enthusiasm with which we amazed the other passengers. 'Do you see the frogs?' we asked our dear stuffer of birds and beasts. 'I see a few,' he replied, 'but I think they have turbans on.' For our naturalist has only one defect: he is as near sighted as all the moles of the Thebaid. Everything—the ship and the pilot included—was right, and we found ourselves all of a sudden in the midst of the magnificent port behind which rises the city of Alexandria. The first exercise that I recommend to all Europeans on landing is a gymnastic encounter, aided by a cane, a stick, or the palm of the hand, with the natives who swarm about the ship, if he does not wish to see his luggage carried away in as many different directions as it consists of packages. Adha Anna, who had been cook to our chief during his first campaign in Egypt, simplified our landing and that of our luggage for us; and after he had rendered us this inestimable service, it did not take us very long to pass off our cartridges as English preserves, and perform our toilet at the hotel.

We were impatient to find ourselves in those narrow streets where people roll about like stones in a torrent ; where everyone treads on everyone's feet on principle, and everyone bumps up against everyone as a religious observance ; where asses, camels, and dromedaries keep the footway to themselves, and the middle of the road belongs freely to the male foot passengers, and to women bundled up in long blue garments, who are either carrying incomprehensible loads, or dragging after them a crowd of children, who hang to their rags like bunches of grapes. We procured at the hotel two European-built carriages, which would have looked well at a wedding at a *mairie* ; and as our party should properly have filled three, we strongly resembled a *noce* as we started off at a great pace to see everything interesting which remains to be seen in Alexandria, notwithstanding the efforts of its inhabitants to turn it into a copy of Marseilles. The straight streets, the houses with green blinds, the photograph frames, and the red signature of Nadar,¹ are calculated to strike a chill to one's first ideas of an Egyptian city so full of historical memories. After we had traversed some portions of the city which were certainly more pic-

¹ A well-known Parisian advertisement.

turesque, but in which the police must have a busy time of it, we came to the foot of the classic Pompey's pillar. Thirty-nine yards in height, and nine yards in circumference, this monolithic column is in red granite, and of doubtful Corinthian style. Hold! Enough!

The consul-prefect Publius had it erected one fine day, in a burst of admiration for the Emperor Diocletian. Incontestably the most remarkable feature of this column, as a work of art, is the collection of beggars at its base, who sell, with piercing yells, fabulous fragments of the almost intact monument. But there is a red granite quarry not far off, and collectors of historical fragments may be happy yet for a long time to come.

Having accomplished this pious pilgrimage, we went on foot to an encampment of Bedouin Arabs, who had halted near Alexandria. It was our first sight of these strange types, whom we were to study more profoundly during our excursion into the Desert. The greediness which led us to taste this pleasure by anticipation was punished by our perceiving, in the course of the evening, that we had imported some irritating little strangers into the haunts of civilization. After our visit to the camp we regained our

carriages, and drove to the borders of the great Mahmoudièh canal. This immense work was executed by order of Mahomet Ali. All the ships of Egypt pass through it, and it is the chief artery which connects Cairo with Alexandria. Its commercial importance is of the first class, and, thanks to it, the exportation of grain and the importation of Western products are effected on a colossal scale. But it is not only an inexhaustible source of commercial wealth; it is also the gayest and prettiest site which we had as yet explored. Here we saw, for the first time, those treasures of exotic vegetation whose absence had made us believe that the Thousand-and-one Nights had never really happened. Interminable alleys of tamarind and lemon-trees shade the banks of the canal; princely villas seem to have met by appointment beside this oriental lake, and mix their vivid stripes and patterns of blue, red, and yellow, with the infinite variety of the verdure, from the pearl-grey of the aloes to the emerald-green of the bananas. Along these enchanted shores are placed splendid boat-houses, in which are kept the pleasure-boats and barges used by the princes and pachas for their excursions on the Nile, of which, indeed, the great canal is only a navigable branch. The long

gaily-coloured *dahabihs* seem to touch the sky with the points of their slender masts, while rafts of antique construction are towed along by oddly-assorted animals. Now an ass and a camel are yoked together, anon a finely-shaped horse pulls in company with a lumpish buffalo. Innumerable flocks of pigeons seem to be the owners of the place, and might safely compete with Parisian sparrows in the effrontery with which they perch themselves on the animals and boldly take toll of their food.

We were lost in admiration of the crowds of equipages, the avalanches of asses, ornamented by riders bumping up against one another in all directions, the long strings of dromedaries, which made us forget the gas-lamps in the Square of the Consulate, where, in honour of the Viceroy, a merry-go-round with wooden horses was provided for the pleasure of the public, just as on the esplanade of the Invalides.

We passed almost by chance through the street in which Cleopatra's Needles are, and observed that to the traveller only one of those monuments is perceptible. The first is literally buried under rubbish of every description, and the second Needle, which is half-buried, looks as if it had fallen into its cellar while in search of its companion. The hieroglyphs

which adorn it, are tolerably well preserved, and record how, in the time of Totmes III., of the 18th dynasty, these two obelisks were placed on guard at the door of the Temple of the Sun. Cleopatra, who did not hesitate at any expense, had them brought from Memphis to Alexandria, to ornament a great temple which she erected to Cæsar, in spite of the gossips of the country.

If, at the commencement of this chapter, I have entirely neglected to mention the Lyons railway-station, although it was the first architectural monument which we beheld after having quitted our hearths and homes, it is because that edifice is destitute of interest and of hieroglyphs, which would constitute its title to admiration by the people of Alexandria, who seem to detest everything which could make anyone observe that among them one is in Egypt. We remained as short a time as possible in this mere country town, which is, in fact, merely the inevitable ante-chamber to Cairo ; just as if, in an ill-contrived apartment, one had to reach the drawing-room through the kitchen.

Formerly, the Mahmoudièh canal was the most direct way from Alexandria to Cairo. Now there is a railroad, with stations and a terminus, just as from

Paris to Bueil ; but the service is not regular ; it is indeed too erratic, for the train only goes now and then, and we were in a hurry to get there. Our first night at the hotel at Alexandria had been disastrous ; and, if we were to judge by the voracious way in which they over-ate themselves at our expense, we must have made all the mosquitoes very ill, when, with right good will, we left the place.

SKETCH III.

BY STEAM.

Damanhour—Kafr-Zayad, or a Refreshment Stall in the Desert—There they are !—Here we are !

By a happy chance, and without the intervention of the Viceroy, the train started. We rolled along, packed into so-called first-class carriages—which were like old boxes, fitted up with mirrors and fixtures equally modern and ridiculous—to Damanhour, the first station which relieved us from our situation as human packages, for which the administration would most decidedly decline to be responsible. This was the first Egyptian village which met our view, offering us all the conditions requisite for painters of the East. The houses, built of earth or dried bricks, were clustered together without any regularity, making it impossible to fix where the landscape commenced or the village ended, so uniformly grey is the colouring. A graceful minaret rose like an apparition out of this series of little boxes. Some tufts

of palms swayed mournfully above this village, which at the first glance might be taken for a cemetery. The time of day also contributed to the funereal aspect of a town in ruins, for all the inhabitants are invariably asleep during the great heat. Only a few women braved the burning sunshine, and came to the carriage doors to sell the products of their industry and sundry refreshments of the most primitive kind. In this country oranges, fresh eggs, *araki*, and camel's milk, replace the traditional orgeat, lemonade, and beer, and were in great demand in the fourth and fifth-class carriages, in which the ruminant population, camels and camel-drivers, are pitilessly packed in layers.

At Kafr-Zayad we found something much more comfortable, and also much more expensive ; but the place, from the point of view of the picturesque, was far less interesting than Damanhour.

A whistle, almost European in its prolonged shrillness, started us off again, and the aspect of the country changing rapidly, we felt that we were getting into the heart of Egypt, into the cultivated lands which form its inexhaustible wealth. It was at the epoch when the grain is green, and it had a singular effect upon us to cross these great steppes of herbage, which we had not believed could exist out of Holland.

White herons, looking in the distance like pieces of paper strewn about at random, formed an odd sort of interruption to the general tone of this agricultural fertility.

Very few palm-trees, innumerable irrigation works, and an horizon invariably green ! it was quite irritating ; but the soul of one of our party, who came from Utrecht, seemed to expand, to delight in the presence of all this grass, unrelieved by so much as a poppy. Our attention was, however, happily diverted by the infinite variety of birds which seemed to accompany the train. Ducks, hawks, and eagles, succeeded each other without interruption, and seemed to have established a line of travel of their own parallel to ours. The countless little watercourses which intersect these lands are covered with birds of every description, and innumerable animals of various kinds, who seem to live together on the best possible terms, notwithstanding the difference in their size and habits. Beautiful little sac-sacs (lapwings) fly about like butterflies, while enormous cranes pull the feathers out of their own necks with slow patience. The dromedaries and buffaloes which constantly meet each other on the road parallel to the railway, look on tranquilly as the trains pass, with the impassible

serenity of Normandy cows, not to be disturbed by steam, whistles, or engines. We had wisely mistrusted the commissariat department, and were devouring some slices of cold veal which we had brought from the hotel Abat, when a cry of admiration escaped simultaneously from our mouths. They were full, but the exclamation was none the less sincere. 'There they are! There they are!' 'Who? What?' eagerly asked our famished fellow-travellers, who were looking at the cold veal—as though they expected to see it smoke under the burning sun—so stedfastly that they had perceived nothing. 'The Pyramids, of course!' replied our dear master, in the tone of a man to whom they were very old acquaintances, and who was about to please them very much by a visit. Sure enough, there were the Pyramids, standing out from the horizon, against a background of flecked sky, for the day was beginning to decline. Such was our first sight of those three stone giants, which seemed to make us doubt the possibility of the world ever coming to an end. Seen from the railroad, Cairo resembles a forest of minarets and cupolas, and any description of it must necessarily be incomplete. But we were going thither! We were there! We are there!

SKETCH IV.

CAIRO.

A Week at Cairo—Bewilderment—The Streets—The Bazaars—The Mouski—Old Cairo—The Valley of Tombs—The Mosques.

‘ON ass-back, gentlemen, on ass-back!’

And, just as in a Japanese dream, we were all on ass-back before we had time to know why; and then, still in the opium trance, without either the power or the will to offer any resistance, we were carried away at full speed, whither, only Adha Anna, our temporary dragoman, knew! Flung, as it were, into a human whirlpool, we had hardly any consciousness of our fantastic situation. A truly infernal uproar made it utterly impossible for us to call, or to hear each other, as our little party rushed onward in a kind of frantic race, in which a laggard was in the plight of a man overboard.

Chmâlak! Yeminâk! Reglâk! shouted our donkey-boys, delighted with our amazement and our fears, and anxious to secure our custom by accelera-

ting the speed of the less spirited asses by repeated blows. At length, after we had swallowed enough dust in one hour to suffice for a lifetime, we began to recognize each other here and there in the crowd, and to be satisfied that, as yet, we had lost no victims by the way. We had left the *Choubra* route, and the tumult of horsemen, dromedaries, vehicles, and foot-passengers, was beginning to subside a little. Heavy huge calèches, preceded by runners in rich costumes, passed us at full speed; in this more aristocratic quarter the authorities have prudently prohibited camel traffic, which is a terrible complication of a crowded eastern thoroughfare. At least twenty times, in our headlong progress, I was on the point of being caught by one of these enormous calèches, and saved by the dexterity of my ass, to whom the shock would have been as terrible as to me, and who was an animal of genius. At length we were permitted to moderate our pace at *Ezbekyèh*, an enchanting place. We were on the *Boulevard des Italiens* of the district, and we owed it to ourselves to travel in a less Apocalyptic fashion.

The ass plays too important a part in the life of Cairo, and indeed the whole East, to be refused the honour of a zoological digression.

In the first place, my ass was not an ass; it was, properly speaking, an ass of Cairo, a quadruped of a special nature, not to be confounded with that mere beast of burden, the vulgar ass. The Cairene ass is as lively, adroit, intelligent, and indefatigable, as his brethren of Montmorency are vicious, idle, and stubborn. The ass is the first, best, and most constant friend one makes in the East, where one never wears out a pair of boots; and the clients of St. Crispin have a bad time of it, for everybody is always on horse or dromedary-back.

We lived on ass-back during the whole of our expedition in the province of Fayoum, as we lived on dromedary-back during our two months in the desert of Sinai and in Petra. We installed ourselves at Cairo in the house of a Frenchman who had formerly been a cook, and we had nothing to complain of except the prodigality of our daily bill of fare, to which we were obliged to oppose a system of rigorous temperance. On our arrival we were worn out by the railway journey, and went to our beds at once.

'I know what I shall do,' said each of our party separately to himself, as he tucked himself in, under his mosquito net. 'I shall get up to-morrow, at four o'clock in the morning, take an ass, and start off by

myself, until breakfast time.' The result of this general, though unimparted resolution, was that we all found ourselves, to the common satisfaction, starting off at the same hour, on ass-back, with the same intentions. Our programme had always included entire individual liberty, and we accepted it as a good omen that on this first occasion we had all been actuated by a similar impulse. In fact, we each and all understood, from what we had already observed, that true happiness consists, in the Egyptian world, of riding on ass-back about the streets, because in the streets everything which is curious and beautiful is to be found. So we set off. Mouski, of which our house forms the corner, was the first picture in that endless series of enchanting surprises which was prepared for us.

Before I throw the rein loose upon the neck of my swift courser, let me remind you that Cairo is the capital of Egypt even more emphatically than Paris is the capital of France, for this good reason, that Paris is only a city, and that Cairo alone is an entire province. It is more than a province; it is a world; it is all the East, past, present, and to come, as complete as in the time of the Mamelouks, as brilliant as at its apogee, as picturesque as under the Caliphs. After a three years' residence, it would be a great

error to pretend that one could have seen and studied it all. Our impressions and notes cannot embrace the thousandth part of what there is impressive and noteworthy to be seen there.

This point settled, *Yallah, Yallah*, on we go!

The plan of our first day's journey was, that we should pursue the Mouski throughout its whole length, turn to the left, and then to the right about a hundred times, and reach the Valley of Tombs by passing through *Bab el Nasr*. We entered the East by the most beautiful street in Cairo, and we left the city by its most beautiful gate; in order to visit the most beautiful monuments of modern Egypt. Either Mahomet favoured us, or our 'fate' was very intelligent.

The street called Mouski is a true type of all that is most animated and brilliant in Cairo. This immense covered avenue comprises, in a complete and admirable manner, all the most picturesque and important traffic of the oriental streets; interminable shops piled with merchandise in extraordinary variety and profusion, butchers' shops, *cafés*, slipper-makers, anti-quaries, and cook-shops, in the open air, all following one another, in most disorderly order, and with the strangest medley of effect. Open cases, half unpacked, lie about the street to attract customers by the odd

expedient of forcing them to walk upon the tempting merchandise.

From the old Jew in spectacles, who requires an urgent entreaty to induce him to disturb the antique rubbish he has hoarded in his mysterious little coffers, to the bootmakers to the sheiks, who look upon boots with elastic sides as the supreme achievement of civilization, every man seems to regard his functions as sacerdotal. There is none of the impudent pushing and puffing so common among our small shopkeepers ; a devout calm presides over all the purchases, all the transactions of the street. The haste and eagerness of our shopmen, their dissertations apropos of the sale of a yard of grenadine, would be regarded here as an execrable offence against good taste ; a religious silence almost equal to that of the mosques reigns amid the counters and the shelves of Mouski. If you wish to purchase a 'kouffie,' you point to the article with one hand, and show the money in the other, according to the price put upon the article by your dragoman, if you are not sufficiently proficient to make your own bargains. After having proposed to purchase the article you wish to have at half the price asked for it, you retire with the calmness of a man who knows the value of that which he appraises, and

is not disposed to persist ; the shopkeeper recalls you by a slight sign ; he condescends to remove his pipe, accepts your money, and hands over the purchased object with a plaintive groan which would become a woman whose child had just been torn from her arms.

If your offer is acceptable to the shopkeeper, he manifests the bitterest grief, by a sound like that produced by a wine-taster in the exercise of his functions ; he pushes away his goods, scolding as if you had beaten him, repeating in a lachrymose voice, '*Là, là, là, mafish,*' between his pipe and his teeth. Observe that the narghilé or the chibouk is an indispensable accessory of every self-respecting Cairene merchant.

The many-coloured stuffs of native manufacture, with pearly shades and marvellous embroideries, naturally attracted our attention ; and we should have been in the shops until now, if our admiration for yellow silk had not been exceeded by our impatience to get a general idea of the city before entering upon a detailed examination of its riches. Nevertheless, the temptation was too strong, and on that very day I found an opportunity, though my ass was almost at the stretch of his gallop, of buying some of those silken kerchiefs called '*kouffies,*' which the

Egyptians use as head-dresses. They are beautiful fabrics, of yellow striped with green and red, or yellow on yellow, ornamented with little flecks of the same shade, and they glitter brightly in the sun. Imperceptible threads of gold and silver artistically mixed in the tissue, give them a metallic lustre which is exceedingly pleasant to the eye. When we come in regular order to the bazaars, I shall have more to tell you concerning the stuffs, the garments, and the costumes which form the most characteristic merchandise of the country.

We proceeded at a quick trot, in the midst of a mob of men, women, children, blind persons, asses, and dromedaries, and reached the end of the Mouski, literally dazzled by the scene through which we had passed so rapidly. The traffic in the streets of Cairo awakens in the newly-arrived traveller a singular sense of apprehension, which obliges him to devote his first moments, with an unpleasant exclusiveness, to the avoiding of accidents. The speed of the carriages, the constant trot of the asses, the methodical swaying of the huge dromedaries, all contribute to produce a sensation of doubt and fear respecting the eventualities of such a headlong course. This feeling is augmented by the total indifference of the foot-passengers to the

warning cries uttered by the runners and ass-drivers. ' *Chmâlak ! Yeminâk ! Reglâk !* ' form a regular and deafening concert ; and yet all these people seem to depend absolutely upon Mahomet to prevent their being crushed to death. It is fatalism applied to macadamization, happily replaced among us by the harbours of refuge for foot-passengers which M. Hausmann has wisely instituted in our most thronged thoroughfares.

The utter carelessness of the crowd, the dogs and children lying about the streets, in the very thickest of the confusion, seem to us a fac-simile of the paradise of Mahomet ; of that enchanting country promised by the prophet, in which tigers and gazelles shall sport together in forests of palm and sugar-cane, and where each one of the faithful shall have at least three hundred pipes, *almées* at discretion, and tobacco in perpetuity. We had experienced that which the learned Academician Ampère calls 'the fever of arrival at Cairo,' and we were beginning to analyse our first impression of dazzling bewilderment. We could now disentangle, to some extent, this fairy-like rush which at first seems quite prodigious and fantastic. The nature of the tumult helps to produce the aspect of extraordinary novelty. The

perpetual roll of the vehicles upon an unpaved surface, the dull echo of the feet of the dromedaries upon the beaten soil, all this gave a mysterious character to the surprising spectacle in which we were absorbed. To these strange sounds were added the clear, piercing cry of the ass-drivers, the music issuing from the *cafés*, the braying of the asses, forming the orchestral accompaniment to the unceasing drone, for the Arab treads the streets in perfect silence, the salesmen cry their goods in their special bazaars only, and indeed the old-clothes men are almost the only persons who now avail themselves of the ancient privilege. The nature of the incessant noise is, therefore, very characteristic, and quite unlike that produced by the loud and discordant sounds of western crowds in motion. The methodical gait of every individual still further accentuates this mysterious character.

The ass-drivers run alongside, with a kind of trotting step, favourable to respiration; the asses always trot, except when they gallop; the horses are more generally kept at a walking pace, like the camels and dromedaries, who would seem to derogate from their dignity if they accelerated the swaying motion which communicates itself in an almost frightful

manner to the enormous burdens with which they are laden.

When our first fervours of shopping had calmed themselves, we turned to the left, followed by our acquisitions, which were carried in triumph by our ass-drivers; and forsaking the Mouski, we began a series of circuits which would have disconcerted Ariadne. Always at full trot, we literally engulfed ourselves in an interminable series of little streets, each more strange than its predecessor, which we learned would lead us in time to one of the city gates, called *Bab el Nasr*, or the Gate of Victory. During this rapid ride we had merely glanced at the admirable sculptures in wood, which, in the form of *Moucharabiehs*, serve as windows and ventilators in the rich dwellings. Arches surmounted by terraces, fountains of pink marble, niches ornamented with stalactites and paintings, columns of every variety of granite, wrought balconies; such were a few of the beautiful objects which met our gaze in uninterrupted succession in these silent quarters of the city, without speaking of half-open mysterious doors, with little gratings in them, which puzzled us, and strongly excited our curiosity.

The door of each mosque was a fresh incident for

us; there were groups, costumes, pictures, which we would fain have carried away with us, and which seemed to be sown broadcast in our way, in order to prevent our fulfilling the plan on which we had laid out the day's doings.

At last, without any clear idea of the way by which we had come, or of the topographical point which we had reached, we found ourselves at one of the extremities of the city, and we rode out of the Gate of Victory, on our asses, as happy and as proud as General Bonaparte, when, on July 29, 1798, he made his entry on the day after the battle of the Pyramids, mounted on a splendid black horse, a gift from the Municipal Council. Bab el Nasr is the Arab name of this gate, the handsomest of the seventy-one gates which adorn the walls of Cairo. It merits all the admiration with which it has been regarded, by the elegance of its architecture, and the great historical recollections which are associated with it. This was our master's first study, on the occasion of his first journey to Cairo. It was a religious duty with me also to devote my first square of fine canvas to it.

The gate, flanked by two enormous square towers, presents an aspect which is at once graceful and imposing, in its colossal proportions, and the sculptured

ornamentation which renders it a genuine object of art. Two gates, literally clad in iron, close the approach to this warlike construction, which still bears the traces of its defence. A military guard is installed under the archway, but purely as an ornament, and for the pleasure of painters ; for as one studies this group of soldiers, decked out in brilliant costumes, one asks how they can possibly be of any strategical utility in the defence of the town. If they were three times more numerous, they could barely stir one of the formidable folds of these gigantic gates. At this place we got our first idea of the irregular militia of which we had heard so much, but had only seen a few odd samples in the streets.

While Egypt is waiting to be conquered over again by some one or other, these toy troops, these comic-opera sentinels, have no other occupation than that of stopping photographers who are desirous of honouring them with their confidence. Their artistically disordered costume, their arms, equally brilliant and harmless, their proud and disdainful attitudes, their least gestures, all seem to have been carefully studied. And yet, nothing is more natural than the interminable Greek moustaches which cut their faces in two, like two huge buffalo horns,

and which form the most appropriate ornament to those fine faces, bronzed by the sun. The moustache, which has nothing Arab in it, is a sign of Albanian origin among the Cairene soldiery. The Arnauts, that Greek militia brought into Egypt by Mehemet Ali in order to oppose the encroaching power of the Mamelouks, inaugurated moustaches at Cairo, and took care to compose the foreign troops' uniforms of all the richest stuffs in the country to which they came as military occupants. This was an innovation in a country where the beard is highly esteemed, and where the respect due to a man is measured by the length of that appendage. The amateur soldier plays his part carefully, and becomes an indispensable piece of furniture at the door of a mosque, or the entrance of a palace. He is the 'Suisse,' the 'chasseur' of our forefathers' time ; for his halberd he has a number of arms, sabres, and pistols, artistically disposed in the various compartments of a vast girdle of red leather, which makes him look like a shop window for the display of guns and swords. His pipe, his tobacco, and his food, all have their places in this walking shop-front. It might fairly be asked by what feat of balancing he contrives to walk without being caught by the walls ; but the street boy of London and Paris

does not flourish in Cairo, and these fierce warriors are safe from the derision and the 'tripping-up trick,' which would be the signal for their decadence in the destruction of their prestige. They are fully aware of their interesting and perilous position, and in order that they may not have to disarrange any of the arms of the museum which they carry on their stomachs, they carry immense flexible whips, made of hippopotamus hide, combining the suppleness of the horse-whip with the precision of the cane, and thus they keep their enemies and their admirers at a respectful distance. This formidable whip is called a 'courbache,' and it is a sceptre of authority which obtains everything, regulates everything, settles everything, when 'bakshish' has become powerless in a delicate question.

On issuing from the city, we fell into the midst of a mob of men, women, and children, who were all screaming with joy, shrieking, and dancing after a fashion, which offered an extraordinary contrast with the calm silence of the passengers we had met in the streets. We found that we had come upon a crowd assembled outside the walls for the enjoyment of a popular festival of a religious and national character; and we recognized at once, by the great variety of

the costumes, and the diversity of the types which passed before us, that many distant populations were represented on this special occasion. Numbers of the spectators must have come from afar, judging by the many-coloured tents which were pitched under the walls of the town. This motley crowd had been transported hither by the dromedaries and buffaloes which we saw standing about, in many instances still unsaddled, and harnessed to their carts. Enormous but insecure-looking swings were erected at several points in the great square in front of the Gate of Victory. Wooden horses—it seems to be decreed that this dear reminiscence of childhood shall pursue us everywhere—were turning round, just as they turn round in the Champs Elysées, ridden by children of all ages, and even by grown men, who appeared to take this simple exercise as the performance of an act of devotion. The festival of Baïram formed the pretext for these truly antique rejoicings. At every step we came upon the most amusing family scenes ; the purchase of a toy for a baby ; the trying on of a pair of boots, which were always too large ; the distribution of doubtful sweetmeats by a hawker of the district. Several Turks were doing conjuring tricks, and exciting the crowd to applause by the strangest contortions. Here, for

the first and last time, we saw one of those mimes, whose whole costume consists of a hat and a cord, and whose pantomime would assuredly not be tolerated in even the least decent place of public entertainment in Europe. Our attention was more agreeably attracted by a sort of little open-air play, performed by an old gray-bearded man, accompanied by a little girl of ten years old. Judging by the expressive gestures of the little girl they were playing a piece in several *tableaux*; the old man was ill, and the child was taking care of him; the old man was restored to health, and the child danced for his amusement, accompanying her movements by a harmless little instrument, which, fortunately for our ears, gave forth a very feeble sound. This noisy, animated scene—composed of innumerable games and means of amusement—was, nevertheless, like all Egyptian festivals, a religious observance. The swings were solemnly erected solely in honour of the Most High, and the faster the wooden horses turned the more the Prophet was glorified. The feast of Baïram, to which we owed all this noise and amusement, is one of the most important solemnities of the Mussulman faith.

Leaving the festal scene, we followed a wide sandy track, bordered on the right by the remains of walls

and detritus of all kinds which had been accumulating there for years; and on the left by a modern cemetery, which stretched away as far as we could see—a forest of little white-washed tombs. Each of these tombs consists of a large slab placed on a kind of stand, formed of one or at most two steps. The principal stone, which forms the body of the tomb, is shaped like the back of an ass. At one end stands a little column, or simply an oblong stone, sculptured throughout its whole length, or only at the extremities, according to the importance of the person whose grave it marks, or the fortune of the relatives. The extremity of the stone, roughly carved in general, merely represents the turban worn in life by the dead man, and the material of the white ball is either marble or ordinary stone, according to the quality of the deceased.

We occupied a long time in crossing this interminable and strange-looking modern necropolis. The form of the tombs and the profusion of turbans which surmount them gave the place the aspect of an immense skittle-field, or of an army in battle array, which had been instantaneously petrified. From the road we could see that sundry remains of palm branches and *ex votos* were lying on certain tombs,

more carefully decorated than the others. Occasionally we passed by women wrapped in long blue veils, squatting close by tombs, and whose forced groans, and methodical gestures, had a savage effect as manifestations of mourning. Sometimes we saw one sitting upon the stones, and occasionally one was lying flat upon the topmost slab, and apparently conversing with the dead man or woman beneath. This is actually the purpose of such visits, and I have been told on credible authority, that there is a kind of formula for such singular conversations.

‘Is God great?’

‘Do you see Him?’

‘Are you happy in Heaven?’

‘Wait for me, expect me. Do you hear me?’

And so on for a long time they question the discreet, mute, unresponding dead.

Whole families may sometimes be seen gathered together upon tombs; a tent will be pitched over the stone, the children play on one side, the women weep, and the men make their coffee on the sepulchral slab, and drink to the repose of the deceased. After we had wandered for half an hour about the sand hillocks under the citadel, we turned sharply to the

right, and the most beautiful spectacle, in my opinion, offered by our journey in the East, burst upon us.

We beheld the city of the Caliphs, incorrectly called the Valley of Tombs, all at once, in its completeness, its minarets and domes, grouped with the premeditation of a theatrical set scene, intended to surpass the most extravagant expectations of the spectator. The multitude of these buildings, heaped together by the marvellous perspective which enabled us to see them all at once, the variety of their dimensions, the unspeakable elegance of their Saracenic architecture, those oblong cupolas of almost Persian form; those elegant minarets whose every stage is a marvel of sculpture, the gilded crescents which surmount them, the glittering fragments of porcelain which still shine out amidst the marble arabesques, all this transported us to the ancient world, and we expected to meet Saladin, mounted upon an elephant, at the next turning. Everything in this region aids to increase the impression of religious admiration which took hold of us; the solitude of the almost deserted mosques, the wild look of the clay huts which surround them, and even the types presented by the few inhabitants, all seem to conform to the style of that magnificent Mussulman epoch in which

the great masterpieces of Byzantine art, interpreted by the Arabs, were produced. This was not Cairo, it was Bagdad, suddenly transported into Egypt, to console painters who cannot have the happiness of going to the ancient capital of Haroun Al Raschid. At a later date I did enjoy that privilege, and I must confess that Bagdad itself, as it is at this day, did not produce so profound an impression upon me as the fairy valley upon which we gazed at the moment I have reached in my story.

We were about to traverse it from end to end, but we felt that we must turn aside and inspect some of those buildings, in order to be sure that we were not the dupes of some hallucination.

The first mosque which we approached, of that interminable succession in which each is more beautiful than the preceding, was the mosque of *El-Achraf*. It was one of the first which presented themselves, and, before visiting the more modern mosques of Cairo, we were about to pay our respects to monuments whose age and personal qualities demanded precedence in our homage and admiration. The ruinous interior of the mosque *El-Achraf* presents a most interesting spectacle. The small sculptured pulpit from which the Koran is read is still intact,

being hidden away in one of the angles of the principal hall. The walls, up to a height of several yards, are decorated with incrustations and mosaics in the most exquisite taste. Higher up, those decorations which are in jeweller's work are completed, by paintings, very sober in colour, but whose admirable drawing do not yield in minute excellence to the finest details of art ornamentation. In a niche on one side there is a sort of collection of all the riches of the building. This niche is not placed haphazard ; it corresponds with the direction of Mecca, and it is from thence that the sheik of the mosque chants the languorous psalmodes of the morning prayer, or drones out the Koran. The sculptured pulpit is placed on the right of this little sanctuary, where there is no altar, but simply a great profusion of lamps and inscriptions. Two enormous chandeliers in copper, ornamented with two wax torches still more enormous, stand as sentinels on either side, and form the sole exterior matériel of the Mussulman worship.

A few days after this, on one of our working excursions, one of our party made a study in this mosque, which admirably represented its mysterious and poetical character. We had left our asses at

the door, and had been for the first time obliged to conform to the rule which forbids the traveller to enter a holy place with his shoes upon his feet. Nothing could be more ridiculous than the array of our boots on the steps, each pair looked so thoroughly individual, and so aware of its disgrace. The regulation bakshish was handed to the sheik who acted as porter to the mosque, and we once more mounted our asses, who, of their own accord, pulled up at the entrance of the mosque *El-Barkouk*.

During our little journey, our escort had largely increased, and the sight of our asses brought out countless mendicants. While we were in the mosque the sight of our coursers had attracted the poor population who burrow among the ruins, and, like flies fluttering about a piece of meat, this multitude of women and children endured the roughest pushes and hustlings of our ass drivers rather than renounce the few copper *paras* which we flung to them as alms, under the pretext of *bakshish*. For the two must not be confounded; *bakshish* is not alms, which it would be humiliating to an Arab to receive. It is a present, a gift between princes who respect and desire to do honour to one another. In the East *bakshish* is a colossal institution; it is an indirect tax upon the traveller

which may perhaps exceed the whole cost of his journey, if he gives way to temptations towards grandeur in his offerings. The gratitude on the part of the child or the woman who receives the gift consists in demanding more with maddening persistence, in proportion to the generosity which you have exhibited on the first occasion.

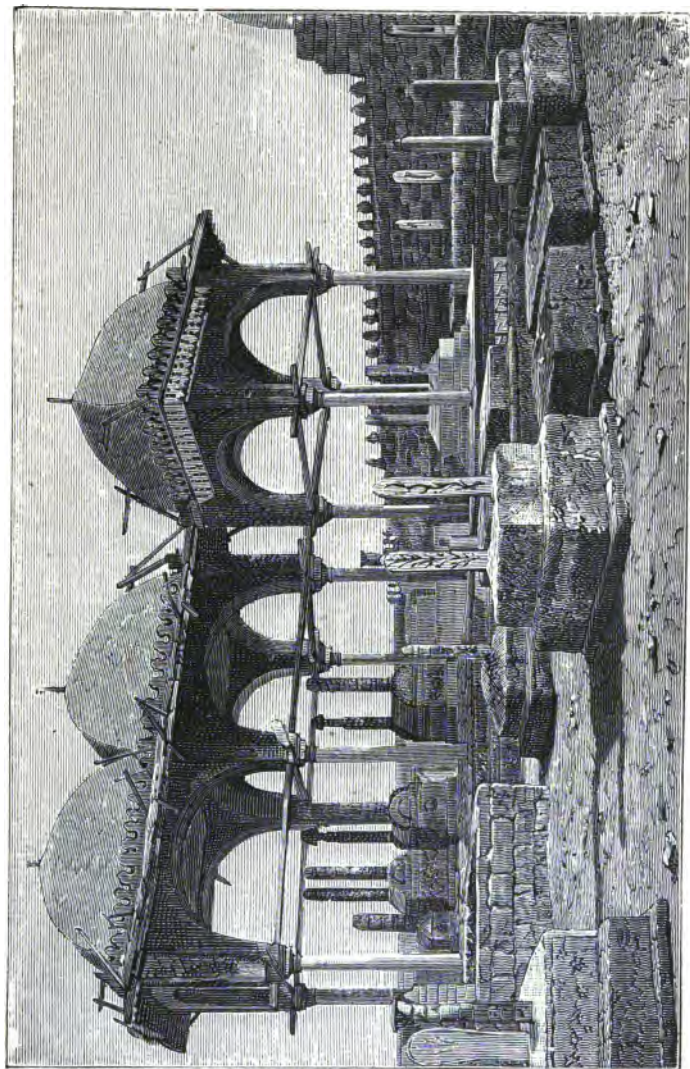
The mosque *El-Barkouk* is more imposing than the first, though of later date. Its principal entrance, surmounted by covered galleries, has the strangest possible effect, and it is prodigally adorned with marble staircases, and porphyry columns. Over this rich ornamentation the taste of a skilful architect has presided, for all this wealth is not the result of a ridiculous heaping together of precious materials and harsh colours, such as we see in the more modern Mussulman constructions. Saint Sophia, with its load of gilding and its huge proportions, does not produce the impression of grand and mysterious poetry which the mosques of Cairo inspire to the highest degree, from the great mosque of Hassan to the smallest of the buildings which decorate the tombs of the Mamelouks, so well do taste and elegance supply the place of the mathematical proportions of a purely massive and rude building. In

Persia and at Athens I had an opportunity of studying this superiority of art over heaped up matter, a superiority which permits the Parthenon to be much smaller than the Church of the Madeleine, and the great mosque of Ispahan to fit three times over inside that which the Sultan Abdul Aziz is about to consecrate to the memory of his mother, in one of the most important sites in old Stamboul. *Non numerantur sed ponderantur*, true artists of all ages have said to themselves, in a Latin proverb but little practised by the Romans, who were everywhere bitten with a mania for constructing things more fatally coarse and heavy than anything which had preceded them. Petra afforded us a shocking example of this truth. During our excursion in the Valley of Tombs, our little party, though always frivolous, had made no unbecoming remarks, had said none of those things which would depoetize Homer himself, if that were possible. This abstinence was a mark of discernment; an indication of the profound impression which this city of the olden time had made upon us, and of the sincere admiration with which we had contemplated a spectacle which I shall ever hold to be unsurpassed.

Regretfully we turned our backs on this beautiful

dream, in order to return to the city by the way of the tombs of the Mamelouks. These funereal monuments, whose dimensions are much less, form a suburb to the Valley of the Caliphs, without injuring the character of the fantastic landscape. The background of the superb picture is formed by the mountain of Mokattam, against which these tombs stand, placed closely together, and as picturesque in their own fashion as the mosques which we had just seen. They are sheltered by canopies of sculptured stone and wood, in which I perceived a striking analogy with the constructions which I had had an opportunity of seeing at Erzeroum, and in the neighbourhood of Mossoul. Were these monuments, or only their ornamentation, the work of Persian artists? either may be the case. The roof of these mausoleums is decorated with small domes, which are steeper and more angular than the Arab cupola proper, and which approach the very open arch of the Persian ogive, which forms a true triangle, rounded at its extremities. This is a remark purely of form, and of presumed analogy which does not imply any archaeological conclusion more authorised to define its origin.

These elegant tombs are tolerably close together,



TOMBS OF THE MAMELUKES AT CAIRO.



and they form a little special metropolis in which we read the story of an entire epoch in the modern history of Egypt. Those fierce Mamelouks must have been brilliant personages to have numbered in their suite artists capable of producing all that is most delicate and elegant in Arab art. There is a faint odour of the 'Jockey Club' of ancient times about these funereal buildings. These Mussulman *Mousquetaires*, doubtless, were connoisseurs of painting and collectors of Japanese curiosities.

We re-entered Cairo by the gate *Bab-el-Karaph*, and crossed the *Karamisdan*, a sort of Champ de Mars, commanded by the citadel of Mehemet Ali, and the square of the citadel, called *Roumeïleh*, or the Horse Market. This is the rendezvous of the caravans, and the site of the military encampments. It is the esplanade of the Invalides, added to the Place de la Concorde, and connected by an endless bazaar.

The lateness of the hour made it impossible for us to study the imposing aspect of these modern constructions on this day, and at six o'clock we sat down to dine, mute with hunger and admiration. But we were not loiterers; we had not come to Egypt to *flâner*; we had to work, to paint well and truly.

So the next morning, I and the sharer of my mosquitos arose early. We had passed a portion of the night, slightly attired, in extricating from our luggage all the articles indispensable to our first proceedings. We had sharpened our pencils, stretched our canvas, examined our colours, and at six o'clock in the morning we set off at speed in the direction of the Amrou mosque, where we had scented wonderful effects and greys more beautiful than nature itself.

Amrou, one of the generals of Caliph Omar, was the author of this monument, which all concur in regarding as the first Mussulman mosque built at Cairo. There is nothing to contradict this theory of its origin, and its style confirms all the statements which are accepted concerning it. The Arabs call it Gâm-a-Amrou; and it may be regarded as the cradle or point of departure of Islamism in Egypt. It was erected A.D. 640, and is situated on the eastern side of old Cairo, with which it is contemporaneous. All around it lie heaps of ruins, the formless remains of the city whose fairest ornament it was. The enclosure of this architectural relic forms a perfect square, the interior being only the regular peristyle of an immense court. Two hundred and thirty marble columns form the bulk of this open building,

whose covered portion is insignificant in comparison with the rest of the edifice. In the centre of this gigantic court stands the traditional piscina found in every mosque, where every Mussulman performs the indispensable ablutions before he commences his prayer. This little octagonal pavilion, still decorated with paintings, is shaded by a fine palm tree, which seems to be the ancient guardian of this holy place. The quality and colour of the water say little for the piety of the faithful, unless, indeed, they be the results of their uncleanness. We made a conscientious study of this remarkable building, whose smallest details bear the impress of Arab art, in all its primitive and simple beauty. A graceful minaret springs into the air just over the principal entrance, and indicates the presence of the mosque, for a great distance, otherwise it would hardly be guessed at, so regular is its form, and so much hidden its enclosure by the ruins of the ancient city and rubbish of every sort, combined with the gradual but sure invasion of the sand.

In the covered portion which forms the sanctuary, there is little to remind the visitor of the reverence of which the mosque of Amrou must have been for so long the object. Its *mirhab*, or niche, turned towards

Mecca, is in complete decay, as is also the *member*, or pulpit of carved wood, which is so religiously preserved in other mosques. In a column close to this ruined pulpit, you are requested to observe that a long white vein is visible, which cuts the smooth surface exactly like a whip stroke. Tradition attributes this miraculous scar to the 'courbache' of Caliph Omar.

The tomb of the great founder of the city and the mosque testifies to his personal humility. His own monument is a simple rectangular stone surmounted by a plain little roof supported by four shabby columns. But this exceeding simplicity does not decrease the veneration with which the true Mussulmans regard Amrou and his mosque, for the greatest personages honour it by official visits, and carry away from it benedictions of a superior quality. On a second occasion, when the whole of our party visited the mosque, we wished to conform to a pious legend which is one of the attractions of the edifice. Under the peristyle of the court, near the door on the right, there are two little columns made out of a single block of marble: they are joined at their capitals, and at their bases, and a very narrow space separates the two. A pious Arab legend assigns several agreeable properties to this aperture ;

among others, that of prolonging the life of every one who succeeds in squeezing himself between the two columns without breaking his ribs. Several of us, thanks to an elegant slimness, slipped through, like letters into a receiver, and carried off the patent of long life; but one of our number had to make such tremendous exertions that we thought the columns must have cracked. 'He will get through!' 'No, he won't!' 'Yes, he will!' He did get through, but at what a price!

In another place, we secured everlasting bliss by crossing a space a few yards in extent with our eyes bandaged, and touching a black patch let into the wall; and the Arabs actually thought we cheated, because we reached the wall in safety, and succeeded in touching the celestial brick.

The air of serious, even fanatical, conviction maintained by the sheik of the mosque contrasted strangely with the comic side of these superstitious legends, which reminded us of our happy school-boy days, our races in sacks, and our blind-man's-buff.

SKETCH V.

THE PYRAMIDS.

Choosing an Honest Robber—The Nile—Roudah—Our First Camp—
Cleopatra's Asp—The Pyramids—Sakkara—Sérapium—Hérons
and Gulls—Dachour—A Storm of Geese—More Noise than
Business.

WE returned to Cairo, at the full speed of our asses, by the road which lies, along the Nile so far as *Boulak*. A thousand incidents, each more picturesque than the foregoing, would have detained us at every step, had we not been preoccupied by the important operation which awaited us at the hotel. This was no less than the selection of a dragoman for our expedition to Fayoum. We held a regular council of war, and this portentous ceremony collected under our windows a fantastic group of the strangest types and physiognomies. A mere glance at some of these sworn-pilots, to whom we should have to confide our existence and our property, made us instinctively button our coats, and take hold of our watch-chains.

The strangest sight I ever saw was this legion of men 'to be trusted,' some of whom, armed to the teeth, were like nothing we had ever seen, except the pictures in Perrault's fairy tales, and the visions of nightmare.

These honest robbers, who are generally very in-offensive, came to offer us their services with a highly comic zeal of rivalry. The strife was as to who should win the day by dint of astounding feats of eloquence, and stacks of certificates wrung from the victims who had previously honoured them with their confidence. They generally spoke several languages; one man spoke eleven, and the chief thing to fear in his case was evidently that he would insist on speaking them all at once, to our confusion and ruin. Our choice was quickly made; and we concluded a double bargain—one for the hire of asses and drivers with Hassahoui, and one for the hire of dromedaries, camels, and camel-drivers for the desert, Sinai and Petra, with a very intelligent Syrian, named Joseph Massali.

The contracts having been read, signed, and sealed, and everything settled, from the number of the fowls to the dimensions of the saucepans, we went to visit our tents, artistically pitched beneath the finest sycamores of Ezbekyèh. We devoted an entire day to the inspection of our travelling asses. I rode mine

on an experimental trip to the tombs of the 'Caliphs, where I made a farewell study, into which I put all the feeling with which the splendid sight inspired me. The next morning, at four o'clock, we crossed the Ezbekyèh, accompanied by all our impedimenta, and reached the Nile just above the island of *Roudah*. Our dromedaries had made this passage the preceding evening, and then we had to cross the river to gain the road to Gizèh, and reach the Pyramids by three o'clock in the afternoon. The island of *Roudah*, which we visited in detail on our return from Fayoum, is one of the most charming spots in the province of Cairo ; but I must not retard our journey into Middle Egypt by giving a premature description of it in this place. The extremity of this island, which divides the Nile into two immense arms, seems to slacken the impetuous current, by breaking its action. No doubt this is the origin of the selection of this point for effecting the important passage of the Nile. This is the station for the ferry-boats which unite the commerce and the passenger-traffic of the two banks. Cangias, dahabieh, little boats of every form and all sizes, are crowded together, and form a very gay and pretty flotilla. Whether the wind displays the graceful sails which clothe the forest of towering masts, or the absolute

calm of the atmosphere obliges the traveller to have recourse to the colossal oars, and the professional rowers this point of the Nile and of Cairo forms a picture of the utmost maritime animation. The scene is rarely saddened by an accident or a collision. The vessels, great and small, swim about like fish, crossing each other without harm, and displaying dexterity like that of our Parisian coachmen in the midst of a 'block.' We were particularly interested and amused in watching the obligatory embarkation of our asses on board the first of the ferry-boats, whose owners presented themselves for the job. First, we had a little repetition of the scene of our disembarkation from the steamer at Alexandria, in the desperate combat between several obliging persons who insisted on serving us against our will, tearing our asses from us, and literally flinging them into their respective little crafts. This was the first time I had occasion to observe the importance of our dragoman, and the expressive gestures which he employed to make himself understood without wasting his native tongue. With his sleeves turned up, and armed with a powerful 'courbache,' Joseph Massali simply beat every object, man or beast, in turn, with all the strength of his merciless arm, until he had restored entire order and tranquillity,

after which he embarked our animals and ourselves with much comfort and precision.

I had already come to this spot several times, and had soon made two careful studies from it, but I had never before been so forcibly struck by the yellow colouring of the stream. The sand which the Nile rolls down unceasingly is the cause of this, and the current being unusually strong that day, we were literally sailing on a kind of vanilla cream. In Egypt, 'gros Nil' colour is as well known as 'Isabelle' in France. We passed under the extreme point of the island, close by the enormous walls which sustain the Nilometer; of which, and its scientific importance to the whole country, I shall speak hereafter.

We had just passed the last banks of sand which lie up against the island, and were out in the middle of the river. A unique spectacle was before us, and the rhythmical swaying of our boat seemed to rock us into a sleep glorified by this delicious dream. It was about nine o'clock in the morning; the sun was glinting on each of the waves which turned the Nile into a troubled sea, and the yellow tinge of the water recalled the golden rivers of Chinese story. On our right we were leaving the

Isle of Roudah, now standing out clearly upon the water, for our position enabled us to take a side view of its entire length. On its shores, and above the walls of its gardens, palms of incredible height reared their stately heads over the Nile. Behind us were grouped the thousand and one little vessels, barks, and boats which we had found upon the left bank; the forest of masts, the white sails, the many coloured stuffs stretched for awnings above the decks, to shelter the crews from the heat of the sun, mingled their effects of colour with the glinting of the sunbeams. The panorama of Cairo on one side, the imposing hue of the Desert and the Pyramids on the other, all Egypt showed herself off to us in that memorable hour in her fairest, most attractive guise.

I could not resist the wish I felt to drink of the famous water of the Nile; and, profiting by the tossing of the waves, I had only to lean over to the edge of the bark, and take from my hand one of those historical draughts of water which one never forgets. We came to the other side; and it was as much crowded, as animated, as noisy as that which we had so lately left. The unpacking of the asses was as funny, as absurd, and as difficult, as their embarkation. During the voyage they seemed to have ac-

quired a taste for navigation, and it was necessary to employ the 'coubache' vigorously, in order to rouse them from their sentimental reveries ; but, though they were literally flung into the air, I suppose they must belong somehow to the cat family, for they all came down on their feet. On our arrival at the village of Gizeh, we found the small army of camels carrying our luggage, which had been despatched on the previous evening, in order that our departure from Cairo should not be deferred. I was quite affected on recognizing my yellow portmanteau, skilfully hooked on the side of one of the herbivorous luggage vans. Poor dear old trunk ! it was still covered with the prosaic railway tickets of the Western world, and seemed quite ashamed of those second-hand hieroglyphs which attested its triviality in the face of the universe ; it must have considered itself lost, it, who had never seen a hump, except on the back of a commissioner. We were started off, men and beasts, in Indian file, first, because of the narrowness of the beaten tracks alongside of the Nile, and secondly, because thus we conformed to the classic aspect proper to a caravan. The dragoman headed the procession, we followed him, then came the line of our baggage camels ; we must have looked like the

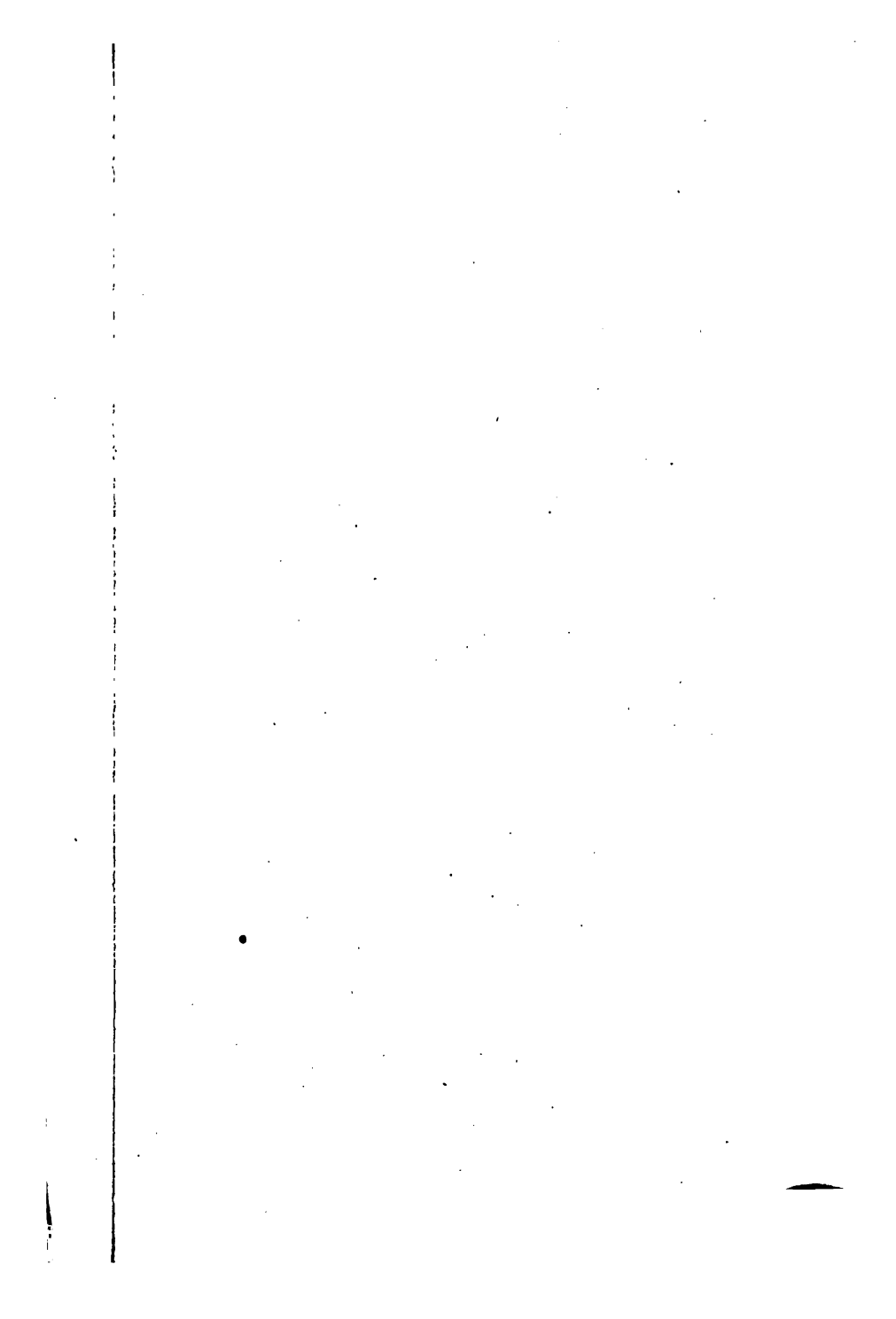
figures in a clockwork landscape ; but we did not think of anything of that kind, we lost sight of our personality in admiration for the scene around us.

After we had crossed the Nile, we entered an entirely new zone, the temperature was already much modified, the proximity of the Desert lent keenness and violence to the wind ; we no longer felt mere currents of air in which the palm-trees swayed gracefully, but sudden whirlwinds which tossed and tore the branches of the palm-trees, and enveloped us in clouds of sand and dust. The landscape, though still very green, had a much wilder aspect. The village of Gizeh, though historical, is in no way remarkable ; it is surrounded by palm groves which render it one of the most picturesque sites in the neighbourhood of Cairo. In fact, the country is so cut up by the inundations of the Nile, that the luxuriant landscape is full of surprises. At Gizeh the palm-trees attain a prodigious height, their rugged trunks are enormous, their elegant tufts crown them like capitals, and produce a delicious shade, impenetrable by the sun's rays ; their symmetry, in certain places through which the road lies, produces the effect of an immense colonnade, supporting a vast dome of wonderful verdure. We merely passed through Gizeh,

and had not time to see the famous egg-ovens which the fellahs have preserved in operation since the time of the Pharaohs. These manufactories of chickens, which excited the admiration of Herodotus, are doing their work to-day with as much precision as when they supplied the kitchen of Sesostris.

In some of the steepest parts of the valley, we met with the *saquiehs*, a sort of turning-well, generally worked by an ass, a camel, or a buffalo. Two huge wheels do the work, which consists of successively lowering and raising a string of small earthenware pots, which pour out their contents into a groove, through which the water is conducted to the adjoining soil, or drawn off for the supply of a little village. The neighbourhood of a *saquieh* generally affords an opportunity for a highly picturesque composition in design and colour ; there is always a varied surface, water, palm-trees, animals and their drivers, groups of women and children who come thither for water, because the Nile is too distant ; in short, the rural life of Egypt in its most real and practical aspects.

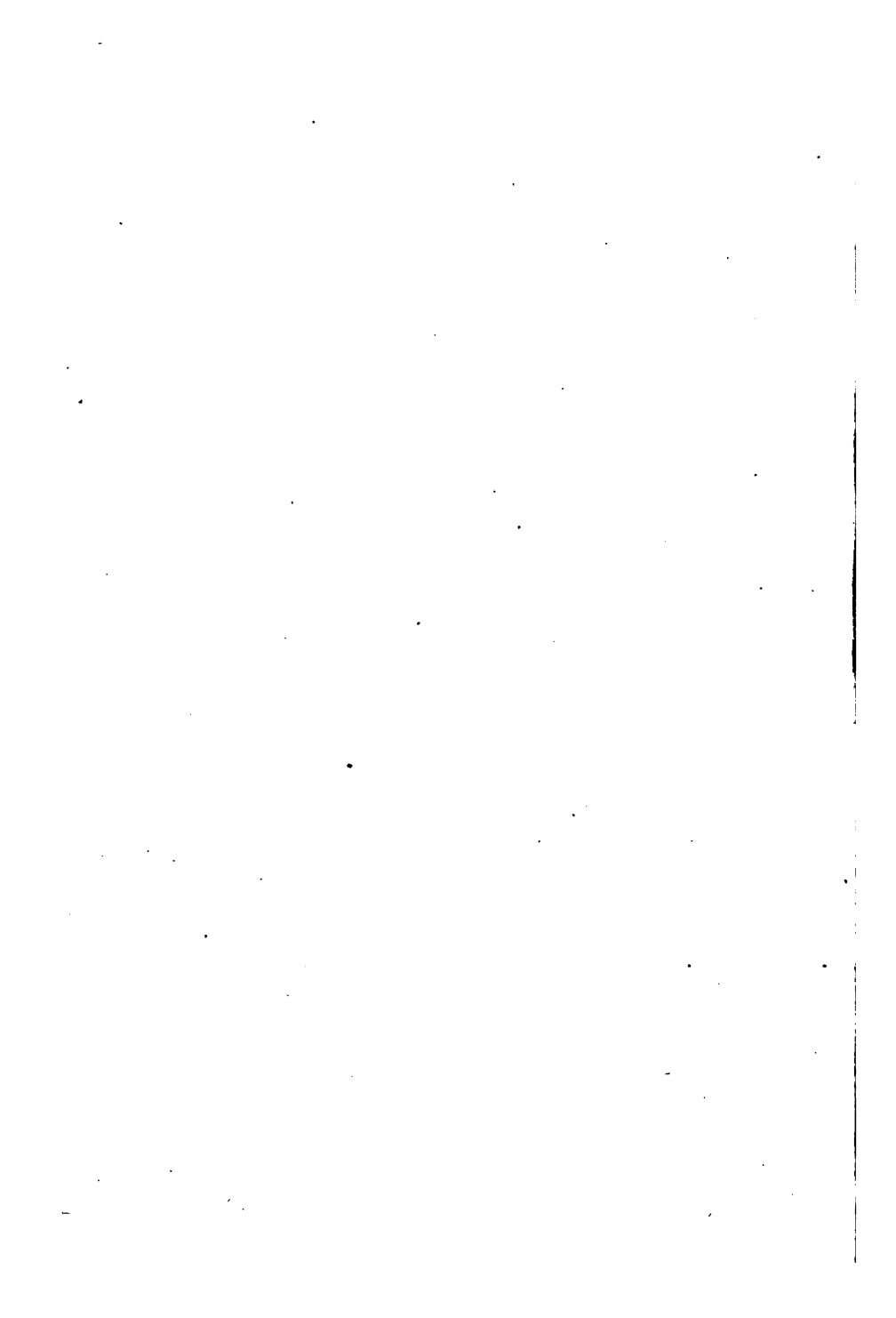
Apropos of *saquiehs*, it is important to observe, that the Egyptians were the inventors of the wells which we improperly call Artesian. Olympiodorus, who lived at Alexandria, in the sixth century, relates







SAQIYEH.



how wells were dug in the oasis to a certain depth, sometimes extending to the depth of 180 yards. 'It is certain,' says Dégousée, 'that the existence of subterranean springing waters was known to the ancient Egyptians, and the method adopted by them is still practised in Africa by the Arabs of the Desert.'

In the search for, and the laborious perforation of these wells, considering the friable nature of the sand, there is an almost complete analogy with the method employed in China and throughout the far East. A sharp-pointed pole, surmounted by a funnel-shaped vessel acting by percussion, is the simple apparatus; this is suspended to a cord, whose methodical swinging constitutes the whole labour. This antique sounding-line measures sixty centimètres, at the most, and we can easily form an idea of the time and patience requisite for the sinking of a well to a depth of a hundred yards. Civilization, making a little progress everywhere, has now placed more powerful and rapid means of action at the disposition of the tellahs. The wimble is generally used. Is it not humiliating for us to reflect that these wells were not introduced into Europe until 1828, when the celebrated Jobard of Brussels imported the knowledge of them from the East? A less important question is the

production of the pools of water which are found on the soil of Egypt ; and concerning which the opinions of the learned are diametrically opposed.

One set of *savants* refuse to admit any source for these liquid deposits, except the natural filtrations of the Nile, invariably parallel with its level. Others admit that the sand and the rock are not so deep, but that veins of clay exist above the level of the great river, through which the pools of water might come, either from the Libyan chains, or from the more distant plateaus. The *sauiehks*, on the borders of the Nile, are evidently only the pumps of the natural reservoirs ; but far away in the Desert, we came across a great number, which were dug at a level considerably above that of the river and its inundations.

Each person is free to choose between the two opinions ; provided the water be drinkable and abundant, the fellahs are satisfied, and so are we.

After we had followed the left bank of the Nile for some time we turned sharply to our right ; leaving behind our beloved palm-groves, and journeying through richly cultivated land, delightful, no doubt, to the eye of its owners, but much too green for us painters, though its monotonous tone makes us better

appreciate the strong hues of demarcation between the cultivated lands and the sands of the Desert.

We found it difficult to study the geological aspect of the country in the presence of the Pyramids, which seemed to be retreating before us, so deceptive did their colossal grandeur render the distance which lay between us and them. We were all dumb with wondering admiration before the three giants, ever growing more huge, and were paying very little attention to the condition of agriculture, when my donkey suddenly tripped with his fore feet, and buried himself in sand up to his knees, sand which I saluted most ungraciously in consequence.

After this proof of the shifting nature of the soil, and considering the difficulties under which our poor animals were labouring, we dismounted, and holding our asses by their bridles, made our first few steps in the sand with the cautious curiosity of children taking their first bath at low tide. In reality, it was quite a novelty to us, for though we had often crossed the sand-pits near Paris, and thought of the Pyramids while performing that feat, that was a very different thing from toiling through powdered sugar, which is the only comparison I can find for the Egyptian sand. At each step we sank to the calf of the leg, and while

this painful progress lasted, until the soil became a little firmer, we did not get over the surprise of it. The difficulties and the slowness of our progress were such that I could not repress a shudder at the idea of the desert-journey which still lay before us. But fortunately the sand is not everywhere so friable, and Providence has occasionally provided considerable stores of stones.

Some months later, when we were in the neighbourhood of Petra, we should have welcomed some of that good sand, as a change from the horrible rocks, which mercilessly tore our boots, our clothes, and the feet of our unfortunate dromedaries.

The aspect of the three great Pyramids, seen from Gizeh, is highly imposing. The position of those wonderful monuments, and their mathematical proportions, as well as their colossal dimensions, far beyond any other work of man's hand, fill the mind of the traveller with astonished delight. But the Pyramids produce the most striking impression when they are looked at from a distance of five or six kilomètres, with an intervening caravan to establish a scale of proportion. Nearer they lose in effect, and like all great monuments, they do not improve at arm's length. Our tents were pitched, under the directions of the dragoman,

and with marvellous celerity, under the shade of an enormous sycamore, which springs, a green giant, from the midst of the sand, against a background of three palm-trees. These form the sole vegetation in the district, under the foliage of the sycamore travellers come to rest their bodies and minds before they begin even the slightest archæological researches. There was no one there to forestall us, we installed ourselves without competition, and took a three days' lease of this hospitable tree, with a clause of surrender. There was ample space beneath its beneficent shade for our camels, asses, tents, escort, ass-drivers, camel-drivers, baggage, and selves.

Our first meal in the Desert made us acquainted with strange seasoning; cold chicken and sand, potted veal with salt and sand, sanded bread and sanded wine, 'fixings' to which our teeth found it very hard to accustom themselves. Thus did our apprenticeship to the Desert begin. The watches of several of the party stopped, the sand having penetrated into their works. In order to digest our sand, and prosecute our studies of local colour, we began to climb the heaps of sand and small stones swept together by the wind in this place, heaps under which a third of the bases of the Pyramids are buried, and

which now look like their pedestals. On turning a corner of one of these sand hills, I found myself suddenly nose to nose with the colossal head of the Sphinx, which seems to guard the Pyramids. When I say nose to nose I exaggerate, for the poor Sphinx has lost his some time ago, a barbarous and ridiculous mutilation attributed to the horsemen of King Cambyzes. Notwithstanding this essentially capital defect, the head produces a great impression. It expresses the utmost serenity. Its sculptor has not desired to produce the perfect Egyptian type, but rather a symbolical emblem of royalty, so to speak, the photosculpture of a Pharaoh, according to the possibilities of those times. The idea of enigma and divination associated by the Greeks with the word 'sphinx,' ought not to be applied to the Egyptian Sphinx, which, in all its reproductions is nothing but the monumental personification of a king. The hieroglyphic inscription usually found upon the sphinxes in Egypt always indicate the name, age, qualities, and great actions of the Pharaoh, the king or prince, conventionally represented by the sphinx.

The colossal Sphinx, who lies so majestically in advance of the three great Pyramids, is about five

hundred yards away from the nearest. The face, which is the most interesting portion, measures nine yards from the chin to the top of the forehead. The body, whose form and attitude are that of a crouching lion, is fifty-seven feet long, from the extremity of the fore paws to the root of the tail. We were unable to appreciate these dimensions, because the sand had so successfully invaded the colossus, in spite of many fruitless efforts to sweep it away, that the head only is now ironically lifted above the sea of sand, as if in defiance of this general burial. According to the accepted solution, this emblem of royalty represents Thotmes IV., of the tenth dynasty, and in the hieroglyphic inscriptions attached to this Sphinx there is confirmation of this personification.

Traces of red paint are still to be found, which destroy the likelihood of the idea entertained by certain *savants*, that the sphinx was painted entirely black. This colossal figure produces a similarly fascinating effect upon everyone. Its magnificent proportions are not the sole causes of this impression ; the expression of the face is singularly real ; it is the smile of beatitude, with just a dash of irony. Archæologists, who know by heart all the sphinx types in Egypt, unanimously give the palm to this gigantic

head, for delicacy and purity of expression. We left this masterpiece of sculpture, in order to give their turn of admiration to the three monuments which have always held the first rank among the seven wonders of the world, and which, though less apparently artistic, are no less the result of combinations and calculation, whose enigma science has not yet been able to solve.

The Great Pyramid, properly so called, is the most northern of the three, which are generally regarded as the Pyramids of Gizeh. We made a provisional tour of it ; the day was too far advanced for more, and deferred until the morrow the task of the traditional ascent. At four in the morning our Arabs roused us, and, under the escort of three guides, we started. The order of the performance is as follows. Two Arabs take you, each by one hand, while the third follows closely behind you, to prevent a fall, on occasion. The delight and pride of the ordinary guides is to make you climb the Pyramid in the shortest possible time ; so that you arrive at the platform exhausted with fatigue, and in a vapour bath. I very foolishly set off, the following day, on a solitary excursion, to ascend the Pyramid. Fortunately, I had directed an Arab to follow me, only

for which precaution I never should have returned; for the descent is much more perilous than the ascent, owing to the singular structure of the layers, and especially to the vertigo to which one is particularly subject during this dangerous operation.

On the occasion of our general visit, whether it was that my Arabs were more adroit or more agile than the others, I was the first to reach the top; for which I returned thanks to Mahomet as a special favour certain to bring me further felicity. The strange feeling which one experiences on the summit of this pyramidal mountain has nothing extraordinary in it: for there is the panorama of the Nile, of Cairo, and the Desert, stretched out before the eye, like the great lines of a raised map, on which everything is too distant to permit each object to preserve its precise form, and to assert its individual interest. Like a great silver ribbon bordered with green fringe, the Nile lies out in the distance, dividing the valley which becomes its bed during the inundations. Mokattam, against which Cairo is built, loses its imposing effect when seen from a height almost equal to its own. Behind us, the Desert stretches away, out of sight, looking like a vast coast whence the sea has retired, leaving the regular furrows of its waves traced in the

sand. I confess that I did not think the spectacle came up to its reputation ; but then I could never appreciate what is called a 'bird's-eye view,' in which one sees too many things at once to be able to estimate any one of them singly.

It had taken us three-quarters of an hour to climb, or rather to be hoisted up, and our ambition was to be well repaid by our early rising. But, as the sun had not made any alteration in either his form or his colour, we beheld him without emotion, and did not join in the cries of admiration organised by our guides, who, with an eye to liberal bakshish, indulged us with exaggerated and most grotesque eloquence.

'*Cawaga*—Monsieur le Comte—forty centuries. Bonaparte looks down on you, Monsieur le Baron. Bono Franzoni—good Arab, good *backchich*.' Such was the orchestral accompaniment to the spectacle which absorbed our attention.

The sun rose at once above the horizon, illuminating with sudden light the Desert, the Nile, Cairo, and all the distant country which we could command. After we had sufficiently feasted on the spectacle, and tried sundry acoustic experiments, we came down again, with some difficulty. That we might settle the

question of the Pyramids in one day, we directed our steps towards the aperture which gives admittance to the interior. Apart from the historical and archæological considerations in which one is free to indulge, this second operation is much more exhausting than the first, and there are few subjects for pictures in the rectangular tunnels through which we were led. The entrances to the Pyramids are all on the north front, and that of the Great Pyramid is within about twenty yards of its apparent base. After we had descended sixty-nine yards of steps, much worn by time, we followed a sort of passage which gradually becomes horizontal ; then we came to another which bends upwards for a distance of thirty-five yards, and leads to a little square room called 'The Queen's Chamber.' Poor queen ! If all her furniture fitted in there, there were nothing very luxurious, nothing in the Benoiton style about her mortuary boudoir, on whose four walls not a vestige of paint remains. We did not remain long in this sad little dwelling. We went on to see another of the same kind, but which still contains the monolithic sarcophagus of its owner. This is 'The King's Chamber,' reached by numerous branching passages, and each lower and narrower than the preceding. We had to crawl on our hands

and knees a great part of the way to this royal chamber.

The last gallery is more spacious than the others, but so steeply inclined that it is a more meritorious work to climb it. At length we arrived, and might salute this last lodging of King Cheops, an apartment which is more interesting than the queen's, not because there is anything remarkable in its architecture, but by reason of its historical associations. If I do not dwell upon the monuments which occupy so important a place in Egypt, in every sense, it is because they are more architecturally than pictorially interesting. The books which have been written upon Egyptian archæology would make a pyramid in themselves, and *savants*, far more learned than we, have already turned over, deciphered, and registered the stones of these monuments, until one asks oneself, Can anything remain to be said about them?

We regained our tents, where a much-needed meal awaited us; and I can only say that the forty centuries which looked down upon us at table ought to have been satisfied with us.

The Pyramid of Clephren was the object of our second expedition. There is but little difference in length between it and that of Cheops, because, though

actually smaller, the site on which it is built is more elevated. It has no platform at its extremity, and its apex, which still displays a portion of the pink granite which once clothed the entire monument, is intact. We went on to see some of the numerous tombs which surround and carry out the design of the Pyramids. These monuments, cut out of the rock, are of the highest importance in a scientific point of view. Lepsius has studied them profoundly. The hieroglyphs and paintings with which they are still covered were of the utmost assistance in the establishment of the chronological order, and the rectification of errors in the history of ancient Egypt. As I had studied architecture a little, I took a great interest in these remains of distant times. Several of the tombs belong to periods anterior to the Pyramids, and are, in fact, the most ancient constructions in Egypt. An incident, which I may call almost archæological, occurred on our return to camp. One of our baggage-camel drivers had dexterously caught one of those reptiles which are the only drawback to the landscape which lies under the beautiful Egyptian sky; it was a 'Cleopatra's asp,' exactly as that reptile is described by writers, or, as it is more generally called, a horned viper. The head of the little animal is

surmounted by two tiny straight ears, like the antennæ of a cockchafer; its bite is much more venomous than that of many of the larger serpents, indeed fatal. It was the first time we had seen this inhabitant of ancient Egypt, perhaps a lineal descendant of the world-famous snake. Our 'stuffer' took possession of him, thus inaugurating the series of unpleasant objects which were destined to crowd our open-air dormitory. The next day we struck camp, after having vainly endeavoured to catch jackals in a wolf-trap which one of the youngest of our party had, in the innocence of his heart, brought from Paris, thus complicating his luggage quite uselessly. We set off, the asses leading the way, the baggage and camels following, in a long column. When we reached the confines of the sand, where it ceased to devour the herb-bearing earth, we deployed and spread ourselves far afield, with our guns, to try a battue amid the thousand kinds of herbage, where whole flocks of birds sat sheltering from the sand storm. Our first bag was not brilliant, but the game was very various. I wish I could be our own naturalist for a moment, that I might recall the strange names of hundreds of big and little birds which rose actually under our feet. From the white eagle to the wild duck, we

secured a sample of almost every kind; and, laden with our useless booty, we arrived at Sakkara at five o'clock in the evening. We had passed rapidly in front of the Pyramids of Abou-Sir, which are interesting only from their form, and had now reached those of Sakkara, which, though less than the Pyramids of Gizeh, afford real archæological interest. The layers of the greatest are laid in the form of a colossal staircase, and this toothed outline produces an appearance quite special to itself, by modifying the angle formed by the apex. Its profile, slightly ogive, has something of the same strange appearance which I noticed in the Assyrian buildings at Mossoul. Our attention was particularly directed to a small temple which had been quite recently discovered by M. Mariette. Though it dates from the most distant antiquity, it looks as if it had been built yesterday, and the colouring of its hieroglyphic paintings is amazingly bright.

The result of M. Mariette's investigations is, that this beautiful little tomb is the work of one of those Pharaohs who did not hesitate before the most difficult constructions or the queerest names. This one called Ti, Ti (it is clear that he ought to have been a Japanese), had his funereal villa decorated

with sculptures and ornaments of extreme richness and delicacy. We were charmed with those hieroglyphs in which several animals were represented according to the most rigorous rules of drawing.

The following day was devoted to visiting the Sérapium. M. Mariette, the author of this wonderful discovery, was not at his head-quarters, so we had to inspect without him the series of fantastic tombs, in which thirty-three bulls, each more like *Apis* than the preceding, have slept for centuries, safe from time's changes. The astonishing aspect of these blocks of stone, the enormous weight which each monolith represents, put calculation to flight at first. But the more difficult the problem, the more simply and ingeniously the Egyptians solved it.

In order to introduce the tombs of the sacred bulls into the subterranean galleries which we visited, a well was cut in the rock, above the space which each enormous stone was to occupy. The well being filled up with fine sand, the block of granite was brought to its orifice; then began a process of gradual excavation, and each huge sarcophagus sank down of itself into the place assigned to it. Could anything be more simple? Now, their extraction would be a mathematical impossibility, as Cambyzes knew very well when he sounded these treasure-chests, and

made up his mind to employ the burglarious tools which he never laid aside, and to unpack the treasure piecemeal. After having thrown to the winds the sacred bones of all the bulls, he made a conscientious list of the plate, &c. ; and when M. Mariette penetrated this hiding-place of the ages, there was not as much as a nail left. Its last lodger might have been a royal prince of a certain House, so clean and so clever had been the pillage. Our camp was pitched upon the border of the last deposit of vegetable sediment which the Nile had left behind it. Our tents, which faced the dry Desert, stood in verdure, and indeed almost in mud, on the edge of a blackish pond, in which the ducks dipped and guzzled. I made a study of the demarcation between the yellow burning sands and the green and fertile earth, and it was exactly like one of those geographical maps on which the departments and the provinces are severally coloured blue and green to aid the memory of the eyes. A dramatic incident occurred in the vicinity of this lake. At eleven o'clock at night, when the fires were extinguished, and everyone was asleep, a perfect army of geese flew over our heads, making a noise of which no words of mine could convey an idea. The extraordinary size of the Egyptian geese, the rush of their wings through the palm-trees, and their wild

hoarse cries, the tremendous noise made by our frightened asses and camels, made this sudden tempest a memorable scene of uproar. In an instant our most intrepid sportsmen were on their feet, had pulled on their boots, and taken their guns, and rushed out with the hope of bagging some of our untimely visitors. But all their efforts proved fruitless; and before morning the winged army had decamped, carrying its noise and rush to some place where men and guns were not.

Sakkara and *Dachour*, where we were to camp on the morrow, lie on the boundary of the former site of the city of Memphis. From the Sérapium and the Pyramids of Sakkara it is easy to follow the outline of this great city, the greatest of antiquity, according to Strabo, Herodotus, and all travellers. It has yet to be discovered, for it is entirely buried in the sand, which is so incredibly difficult to search, in consequence of its constant shifting, that it is hard to say when any of the buried treasures and wonders may be brought to light. We saw numbers of bones which had been naturally disinterred by the movement of the soil, and had only to stoop at any moment to pick up quantities of human remains calcined by time. Innumerable mutilated mummies were strewn

about the sands; and under heaps of wrappers, and heads of hair, I found a woman's skull, from which I extracted several exquisitely white teeth. I have no doubt they belonged to one of the ladies-in-waiting on the daughter of Pharaoh.

My friend G — brought home two skulls, which now adorn his own little Sérapium at Chatou. I contented myself with filling my pockets full of wrapping-cloths, all well preserved, and whose fine close web gives us an idea of the stuffs they wore in the morning years of the world. I also had the good fortune to pick up one of those little amulets, in enamel, which are so common in Egypt, but which one generally has to buy from the Arabs. It represented a woman with a lioness' head—the ordinary personification of the goddess Isis. The profusion of remains on the surface, and within reach of one's hand, makes one think longingly of all that would certainly be found beneath, if the search were not so costly and so difficult.

We three were refractories, and we now had to think about rejoining the caravan, which had left Sakkara, in the morning, to go on and encamp at Dachour. There was a certain charm of isolation about our little group of four, including our Arab. In

the face of the immensity of the desert, and with two respectable pyramids for points of comparison, I felt curiously small. We looked like flies on the surface of a huge cake dusted with powdered sugar.

Having been misinformed respecting the road by which we should strike the path to Dachour, we found ourselves climbing interminable sandhills, like great sea-waves, and the obstacles and movements of the ground multiplying themselves from moment to moment in the way of our unfortunate beasts.

By dint of resignation and the 'courbache,' we at length emerged from the sand labyrinth, and began to see close to us the palm-trees, which we had been so long looking at in the distance, that we had begun to think we were deceived by a mirage. In our natural anxiety to shorten our route we had prolonged it to an extent which rendered our calculations respecting the hour at which we might hope to reach Dachour decidedly dispiriting. We were then crossing at speed a splendid palm-tree wood, in which the stems were so close together, that it required very careful riding to avoid the risk of breaking our legs between their rugged surfaces. Suddenly, we encountered one of those immense canals which intersect Middle Egypt. These works are very important, and

it is hard to calculate the length of time and the incredible number of hands which were requisite to produce such valuable results. When I have to speak of Lake Moeris, I shall enter more at length into the nature and importance of these great undertakings, to which the fertility of half Egypt is due. A bridge of singularly graceful form arose before us, announcing that we were midway towards the point we desired to reach before nightfall. This little architectural performance, flanked by small round towers, was neither barbarous in form nor in materials. It forms an elegant ogive, as pleasing to the eye as it is solid and secure. I should have been very glad to make a study of this bridge, built in the purest Arab taste ; but we were already late, and we must either accelerate our pace or sleep under the sky. We crossed the bridge, and followed the canal for a long distance, putting up flights of wild duck, with which the surface of the water was positively black.

So little did our presence disturb the herons and other birds of prey of all sizes, that they seemed to escort and follow us. The rarity of sportsmen, and the special game-laws of Mahomet, are the causes of this actual blockade of game. We began the day in the finest sand, and were finishing it in mud ; for in several

places we found ourselves in little invisible ponds, entirely covered with grass and flowers, and looking like delightful fields. Hunger and opportunity tempted our asses away from the beaten track, and then we got into a series of the most picturesque difficulties, but with no worse result than our arrival, very much out of breath, at the village where our little archaeological escapade had occasioned some uneasiness. It was dark, we were hungry, we had no eyes except for our soup, and therefore we reserved for the next day an inspection of the beautiful village whose palms sheltered our tents. Dachour is one of those oriental sites of which I retain the most exact remembrance. There is a striking individuality about the village, from several points of view.

Its earthen buildings are of special interest ; for, were it not for the primitive ramparts on which it is perched, the Nile would entirely submerge them. In fact, Dachour is in a hollow, relatively to the rest of the valley and the line of the Desert ; and is exposed more than any other village to be completely overrun by the waters at the epochs of the Nile's rising. This intermittent island is beautiful to see ; the palm-trees which turn the village into a green bouquet are encased in the counterforts which support the earthen

dwelling-houses. This enchanted fortress does not charm the eyes only by its exceptional situation and the elegance of its two little mosques ; it is also interesting from the independent character of its inhabitants. It is a little isolated kingdom. There, in fact, we found for the first time an absolute, all-powerful municipal council, presided over and represented by a *sheik*, who entertained no doubt of his own omnipotence. These villages, organised upon a simple and regular administrative footing, have, nevertheless, a great character of independence ; and, if the tribute which they pay to the Pacha or the Governor be somewhat exorbitant, they pay it with the air of a conquered people who accept enforced taxes, but who have no notion of submitting to interference in their affairs. A village is a large family, a small government, in which the sheik is invested with full powers, and his authority is transmitted, not from father to son, but to the oldest member of the family.

We were most warmly welcomed. The sheik gave us a guard, which was a wholly unnecessary precaution, and merely exposed us to a further demand for *bakshish*. This custom has arisen from the responsibility which would fall upon the entire village in case of the travellers' camp being attacked. The entire locality

is bound to extend protection to strangers who, by pitching their tents upon its territory, honour it with their confidence and esteem. We were given a certain small official character in the eyes of the population, who collected around our camp and gazed at us as if they took us for curious animals, calmly watching all the domestic operations of our open-air household.

Our kitchen, our saucepans, and the method by which we prepared our food, amused them immensely. We certainly appeared to them to be savages from the West, who fed on unknown materials, and shamelessly drank wine before the face of the Prophet himself.

The entrance to this little acropolis was specially remarkable; in this place, the walls which surround the village are higher, leaving a passage which must be filled up at the time of the rising of the Nile. Two white cupolas, flanked by two elegant minarets, are like the scenes in a comic opera for grace of form and the premeditated, placed-there-on-purpose look they have. These mosques, which are built of rude materials, are of the purest Arab style in their outlines, and also in their ornamentation.

The children and women took a great interest in

us, and I particularly remember the number of spectators who witnessed my arrangements for taking the portrait of the village. They remained, generally in silence, watching my least movement, for hours together, their curiosity being specially excited by my colour-box. I amused myself by putting a little colour on their fingers. Several were delighted ; but others were so frightened that they ran away screaming, as if I had thrown an evil eye upon them. I sketched some European hieroglyphics upon the earthen jars of some of the women there, which made them laugh merrily, and I was soon besieged with commissions, most eager and flattering, quite beyond my power to execute, notwithstanding all my good will. After a farewell visit to the sheik, who had come on the previous evening to our encampment, we set out at six o'clock in the morning, escorted by the population.

Two very ill-equipped horsemen had been given us as guides, for we were now about to enter in earnest upon the desert route to the centre of Middle Egypt.

SKETCH VI.

THE DESERT.

A Sand-strewn Breakfast—Tamyèh—The *Conservatoire* of Dogs—A Wild Boar Hunt with a Knife.

AFTER having successively followed and crossed a long series of canals and ponds, we reached the confines of the cultivated land, and began to tread the sands of the Desert. This was to be a hard day's work, for we were to make only one stage of it to the village of *Tamyèh*, which is in the centre of the province of Fayoum. The day was, in fact, a hard one, notwithstanding the precautions we had taken, because we had not counted upon a hurricane of sand which surprised us in the midst of the Desert, just at the always interesting moment of dinner.

It must have been mid-day at the Bourse, but it was at least four o'clock by our stomachs. We had unpacked our ordinary flat dishes and plates, with all the eatables which were to figure upon them, and our eyes were already devouring the papers in which all these cold viands were wrapped up. We were just

taking hold of our forks, when, quicker than lightning, an immense sheet of sand fell upon us, the sand-hill against which we were seated was dispersed by the tempest, and rushed like a cascade over everything, ourselves and our breakfast included. Waves of sand, lifted from the earth, struck us in the face, and blinded us. The bottles, the plates and dishes, the eatables, were all buried in sand, and we had to dig vigorously to prevent our furniture and ourselves from disappearing in the cataclysm. The Arabs, after giving us a little help in our distress, lay down in the sand, thus avoiding the painful contact of the wind, which struck us in the face, like blows from a whip. The temperature had suddenly changed: icy cold had replaced the heat which we had been feeling since the morning; and, like the currents of hot and cold water in the sea or in rivers, this layer of cold air seemed to fall from some celestial glacier. Our wretched asses suffered horribly; notwithstanding their strong instinct of self-preservation, and the devoted exertions of the Arabs, the unfortunate animals were seized with actual convulsions, and they struggled and rolled about in frantic efforts to escape from the invading sand. The blood streamed from their eyes and nostrils, and in the midst of the

uproar, we thought of the army of King Cambyses, which, surprised, like us, in the desert, did not bring back so much as a single chassepot.

Even our dragoman acknowledged that this was a terrible day, and one of the hardest of our expedition. The matter in hand was to get away. This was laborious enough, for, after we had found the greater part of our accessories, we had to set to work to extract our asses from the sand, and to bring them on. We muffled our faces in veils and kouffies, but the sand got through everything ; our eyes were full of it, and the violence with which it came against our skin almost flayed us alive. At the expiration of two hours the storm abated, happily for the success of our journey, and we passed on to another experience.

In an opposite direction to that in which we were journeying, the mirage showed us endless rows of palm-trees ; our critical situation, this treacherous apparition, and the inverse route which we were pursuing, contributed to render us apprehensive about what the result of our day might be. At length, the Arabs, whose eyes are accustomed to the desert and its snares, pointed out some real palm-trees. But I could not see them until we had advanced nearer to them

by two kilometers. Those two green tufts rising on the horizon above the sea of sand affected me like the first sight of a promised land. We felt inclined to cry, 'Land ! Land !'

As soon as we reached these trees of deliverance, we took some indispensable rest in their shade. Our asses and ourselves were in a deplorable condition. Our baggage camels, being indefatigable animals, and above such merely human weaknesses, had gone straight on to Tamyèh, where we expected to rejoin them, and to find our tents pitched and ready for us.

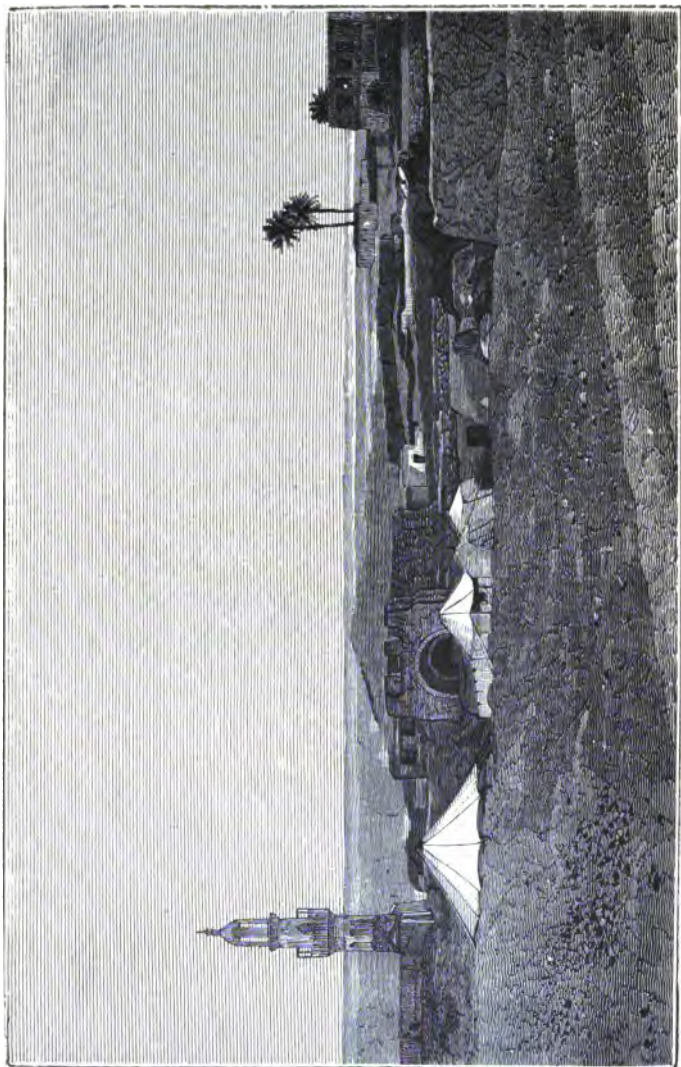
We had still a large tract of the Desert to traverse, and it was not easy to get into harness again, after tearing ourselves from our brief slumber. The aspect of the ground was changed ; we could perceive the tracks of men and camels, we were approaching soil more solid, less mutable than the sands in which we had narrowly escaped burial. By the firmer tread of our animals we felt that we were passing over rocks, now covered, but which we should soon behold under a far different aspect. After having climbed some rugged and irregular steeps, we suddenly found ourselves on the brink of an immense ravine, a veritable precipice, more than a hundred yards in width. This natural canal stretches from above Tamyèh to lake

Birket-Keroun ; and serves, with others, to supply the waters of the Nile, which completely fill it during the inundations.

When we reached its brink, it was dry, and it presented the wildest and most frightful aspect possible to conceive. By a strange caprice of nature, its great rocks looked like the remains of an immense city precipitated into the abyss. Grasses and shrubs of all kinds bound these rocks together, and made a natural den of them for the most ferocious beasts one could imagine. We found we were not wrong, and that this Egyptian savannah deserves its reputation only too well. Hordes of wild boars have installed a republic there, highly disastrous to the dwellers in the vicinity. The destruction they cause among the crops is a real calamity to the country, which can hardly sustain itself, being literally surrounded by desert. Old sporting reminiscences rendered this spot very interesting to our chief, who had not come there for the first time, and who executed, on the following day, the finest shooting scene the dwellers in Tamyèh had ever seen in a picture.

We arrived, and had to effect a provisional installation. The village, which is tolerably large, stretched before us on the other side of this immense ravine.





FAYOUM: THE VILLAGE OF TANYEH.

It was by no means easy to cross it ; but we did it somehow, and two hours afterwards, we were under our tents, pitched towards the north-east, in front of the principal gate. This wide oasis is a charming landscape, framed in a broad golden line, which bounds it on every side. It is an island of verdure in a vast expanse of sand. From our high-perched camp, we commanded the minutest details of the village. Facing us was the principal gate, a kind of arcade, composed alternately of dry and burned bricks. This is the meeting-ground of all the arrivals, the great market where all the most important personages of the locality assemble. On the right a pretty minaret springs into the air, like the tower of a village church, and several tufts of palm-trees break the monotony of the roofs and terraces of the houses. Animals of all kinds, as well as the inhabitants, walk about on the roofs, and nothing can exceed the oddity of the spectacle, regarded on a large scale. Here are women, spreading out linen to dry, Arabs rebuilding a dilapidated roof, children running about, and jumping from house to house like our liveliest gutter-cats. In all this comical animation the feature which struck us most was the incredible number of dogs : never had we seen so many, or such a variety. Not a terrace but

was ornamented with at least three or four of these animals, sitting like sphinxes, watching and spying our every movement.

This picturesque *coup d'œil* of a city of dogs was followed by a much less pleasant impression during the night. From the setting until the rising of the sun, these thousands of guardians of the public peace called and replied to one another, in every note of the canine gamut, the plaintive, the piercing, and the harsh. It was enough to make one believe that Jezebel allowed her dogs to eat her, rather than listen to them any longer. The state of fatigue to which our day in the Desert had reduced us, rendered this gratuitous and obligatory concert the more unendurable, and it lasted, without the briefest *entr'acte*, from six o'clock in the evening until five o'clock in the morning.

That horrible night was one long, unceasing nightmare. Cries, threats, curses, all were vain. Our dragoman, in an excess of zeal, killed two of the dogs with his revolver; which made the case much worse, for all the dogs in the village rushed tumultuously to devour their comrades, and we were surrounded by a hideous tempest of howls which would have frightened Dante. With the first rays of the sun came quiet, the

infernai chorus sank into silence. It was time, for we were quite worn out, not one of us having closed an eye all night.

On the next night but one, we organised a hunting expedition, with the assistance of some natives. The sheik of Tamyèh had professed much interest in the matter, and promised us his active aid ; so that we expected a display of his forces in proportion to the enthusiasm he had manifested the day before. In the morning, everyone was ready, and we were awaiting the promised reinforcement, all being under arms in the centre of the village, when we perceived a big fellow, simply attired in a brown tunic, much too short, who came towards us, jumping and gesticulating like a lunatic. This ape was the son of the sheik, and, apart from this title to consideration, nothing in his exterior was calculated to excuse the scantiness of his costume. Cries, jumps, pirouettes in space were all we could obtain from this acrobatic Nimrod for some time. When we observed to him that, to combat the Desert enemy, he had no weapon but his ten fingers, he sped away to the tent in which our food was cooked, and returned with a huge knife, which he held between his teeth so that his hands might be free for his extraordinary gesticulations.

This strange person was escorted by ten other Arabs armed with sticks, who were to rouse, track, and beat up the game. They set to work on the slope of the deep ravine which cuts the whole province in two, and after some time had been spent in a fruitless search, notice was given to our chief of the vicinity of an enormous boar. Three skilful shots disposed of the animal, who, though he had a shoulder and fore-paw broken by the first, continued his furious charge until the third dropped him. He rolled back into the torrent, whence the Arabs picked him up. It required a camel to bring home this wild boar, a very singular one in that country, where they are generally small, for he weighed more than three hundred pounds.

The son of the sheik was quite wild with delight ; he executed indescribable flourishes in the air with his knife, as he marched in front of the procession. 'Alouf! Alouf! Kalas! cawaga Gérôme Kebir!' Such was the joyful cry with which the whole village deafened us. David, when he brought back the head of Goliath, could hardly have received more vociferous welcome. The Coptic population, in their capacity as Christians, came to help us to consume this enormous head of game, and a general distribution

was made in the village to our co-religionists. Everybody was of the party, for the dogs had their share of the 'curée,' and, unabashed by the crowd, voracious eagles and hawks flew down upon them, and disputed the prey with beaks and talons. Wild boar steaks, with Madeira sauce, filet of wild boar with red pepper sauce, cutlets of wild boar with no sauce at all, figured for several days in our bill of fare. It would have rejoiced us to have sent some of the savoury meat to France, to console our families, but the difficulties of transport obliged us to relinquish the promptings of our hearts.

As for my personal achievements in the sporting line, the following is an exploit which I performed without knowing it, and which gives an idea of the profusion of game in this district, considering my awkwardness in the use of fire-arms, and that I took much more interest in my brushes than in my gun. I quitted our camp alone, and set off, with my painter's kit, intending to make a study of the village from the side opposite to our encampment. I did, however, carry my gun with me, whereby I complicated my difficulties, but imposed respect upon the population by the aspect of that warlike implement. I had installed myself on the edge of one of the little canals

which keep up the delicious freshness and verdure of Tamyèh : the palm-trees, the pretty minaret of the principal mosque, some Arab houses gracefully grouped, were all reflected in the water, and had induced me to set up my war parasol in this charming spot. I was not alone ; thousands of birds were fluttering about at a little distance, quite unsuspecting of the vicinity of my gun. The temptation was too strong. I fired into the feathered flock, aiming especially at one beautiful bird which had been circling round me for half an hour, seeming to mock me each time it tapped one of its long pink claws against its great yellow bill. This bird was the sole object of my stupid resentment, and I was not a little surprised to find that my solitary shot had also hit three pigeons and two sic-sacs which were completely hidden from me by the grass and stones. The flight of birds which followed the explosion was like a rising cloud floating off to come down elsewhere, but they soon returned and began actually to peck at my colour-box. I was not at all proud of the useless massacre of which I had been guilty, and would gladly have given half my parasol to restore their innocent life to the beautiful little creatures whose mortal remains our 'stuffer' welcomed with delight.

The fact is, sport is no longer sport in this wonderful country, this veritable Promised Land, where game-keepers have been on strike for several centuries.

Towards evening the whole party came out, and we invested one of the great ponds on the south-west of the village. Not the sands of the sea-shore, nor the stars of heaven, can give an idea of the flocks of wild duck which blacken the surface of the water. By the declining light, the compact masses seemed to be immense floating rafts which divided themselves into squadrons under the shot which we poured upon them. The night fell rapidly, happily for them, and put an end to this one-sided warfare. The flesh of the wild duck of these parts is unpleasant to the palate ; among the immense number only a few birds served to recruit our larder.

On the following day we left this enchanting country, much to our regret, and the after evenings in our tent were frequently enlivened by our recollections of our short sojourn, of what we did, and our ideas of what we might have done.

We had some difficulty to get out of our camp ; the game escorted us without any resentment, and added its many voices to the chorus of the population, who bestowed most eloquent praises and thanks upon us,

for having delivered them from the 300 pounds weight wild boar. At a short distance from the village one of our party killed, from his ass's back, twelve pigeons by one shot, so that the province of Fayoum was thenceforth dear to the memory of our cook. We missed these gluts of game sorely in the Desert, and many times did we speak low and softly of Tamyèh, when English preserves and sardines formed the staple of our food. From Tamyèh, the north-eastern extremity of the province of Fayoum, we intended to journey to the centre, halting at the village of *Senouhrès*, one of the most important localities after Médinet.

We were still crossing the desert, but it was less dusty and less perilous in this part than in that which we had travelled through from Dachour. Here, the ground was firmer ; the camels, the asses, the Arabs, and ourselves could move more freely, and on the first day we accomplished without over fatigue a stage which enabled us to sleep that night at *Senouhrès*.

SKETCH VII.

THE DANCERS.

Senouhrès—The Municipal Council in High Spirits—Hasné the Dancing Girl—The Fellah Women—A very Low Fellow, even after Death—An Abduction.

WE were beginning to get out of the sand, the village appeared in the distance, like an immense fortress perched upon an elevated plateau and covered with graceful minarets and cupolas. Those domes which first came into view belonged to an ancient cemetery of considerable extent, now abandoned and ruinous, but whose importance bears witness to that of Senouhrès in former times.

A number of pools, rivulets, and small canals make the approach to the village difficult and tedious. As we had to pass without any intermediate stage from fine sand to a marshy soil, it took us several hours to get now round, and then across, these endless small obstacles which divided us from the destination which we expected to have reached much more easily. The village of Senouhrès, in consideration of its commercial, and especially its agricultural importance, has

a regularly constituted administration. Authority is there installed on an official footing by no means inferior to our most complicated sous-prefectures, so that forewarned by our dragoman, we prepared for a complete series of formalities. After we had made the tour of the entire village, we pitched our tents to the south, in a meadow, on the border of a delicious stream, and in the shade of grand palm-trees. We had patriotically hoisted our national flag before the eyes of the astonished population, and were gravely preparing to put on our pearl-grey gloves in order to do proper homage to the scheik and the other magistrates of the town.

Already our animals, adorned with their gayest caparisons, had crossed the ford which lay between us and the municipal dwelling, already we scented the coffee which would certainly be offered to us, when our dragoman, preceding the line, entered into a long conference with a brilliantly-attired young Arab, who had come running to meet us, quite out of breath, and who now began to use most expressive pantomime. We stopped, wondering, and presently the dragoman turned back, and announced to us, that the scheik and the whole Municipal Council, apprised of our intended visit, found it impossible to receive us on that

day, but that on the following morning, without fail, those gentlemen would have the pleasure of paying us a visit of welcome. In the meantime they begged to present their homage and good wishes.

Very little concerned at this delay, we were about to return to our tents; when some of the party, not willing to have had so much trouble for nothing, induced the dragoman to make certain enquiries which enabled him to conduct us to the quarter in which the dancers live, those *Almées* of whom we had perpetually talked before leaving Paris, and of whom we dreamed every evening, and indeed afternoon. After many twistings and turnings in narrow lanes between small and dirty houses, we arrived at a little door through which a crowd of Arabs, of all ages, and sizes, and of both sexes was pressing. It was by no means the mysterious portal of our fancy, guarded by fantastic beings adorned with many-coloured costumes and armed with sabres; it was a free passage of the most liberal kind, and we simply walked in without any announcement. In the middle of a small square court, a dozen women, seated on carpets and mats, were nibbling oranges and drinking water, in the company of several very well-dressed personages who were not at all disturbed by our arrival. We saluted

those gentlemen, who immediately made room for us, and politely invited us to seat ourselves beside them. Then began the most absurd scene possible. No doubt we had come expressly to see these women, but we had not foreseen so very facile a reception. Our limited acquaintance with the Arab tongue restricted the expression of our sentiments to a ludicrous repetition. The phrases which we knew best, are those which relate to the harnessing of our mules and the equipment of our camels, so that we ran the risk of enormous blunders by the display of our little repertory. 'Kloss kotir,' and 'kotir kloss,' was the monotonous refrain which accompanied the sweetmeats which we presented to them in handfuls. 'Ya habibi,' was the response. Our male neighbours were much delighted and amused by our attempts at making ourselves agreeable. The prettiest of these women wore necklets, bracelets, and other ornaments of great value, and the quantities of golden coins fastened by threads to the braids of their long hair, coins of all sizes, and bearing various effigies, proved how sumptuous are the bakshishs bestowed upon the dancers.

One of the women struck us particularly, not so much by the regular beauty of her features, as by the



A DANCER.

wildness of her face, and the marvellous fire in her eyes. As an *artiste* she seemed to be the chief object of our neighbours' attention. Our dragoman asked her name ; she replied '*Hasné*,' and *Hasné kïoss ketir* became the phrase of the evening. I had a happy thought, which secured me a place in her good graces beyond that of our indigenous friends. I took out of my pocket one of those little neckties, price sixpence, which are much favoured by our peasants in their Sunday dress ; and began by first letting Hasné see it. She jumped at it exactly like a monkey, seized it, tied it round her neck, snatched it off and tied it round her head, and then endeavoured to run away, under the impression that I was about to deprive her of the treasure. I made her understand that I gave it to her as bakshish, and then her joy was unbounded ; she approached me with convulsive movements of satisfaction which resembled epilepsy. It was a triumph, but I was afraid she would bite me. A storm of words, one more sharp and discordant than the other, whistled about my ears, and our dragoman vainly endeavoured to translate the wild and oriental expressions of her savage gratitude. As soon as we had arranged that the dancers should visit our tents, where we proposed to have a

grand performance, we took leave, and returned to our camp, where we proceeded to organise an official representation for the morrow. Our programme was, dances by the Almées, illuminations, games, pistol-firing for cakes, and a ball, with or without the permission of the authorities. Indeed, we intended to invite the 'maire,' and his staff, to this charming little entertainment. We expected him to visit us in the morning, the formula of invitation was all ready, he had only to come. But what was our profound amazement, when he did come, he and his staff, and we found in them the same persons on whose visit to the dancers we had intruded on the previous evening! We could not help thinking of the majestic terms in which, on our arrival, their ambassador had expressed their regret at their inability to meet and welcome us.

We recognised each other with much gravity and politeness, and it was clear that all the sense of the ludicrous in the adventure was on our side. Coffee and cake went round in succession, the most extravagant oriental compliments were exchanged, always by the medium of the dragoman, and all was for the best in the handsomest tent in the best of camps. Everything was conducted with perfect seriousness. Our



guests remained to breakfast with us. This was serious for the table-cloth, as they used their fingers for the purposes to which we apply knives and forks. They were particularly pleased with our Dijon mustard, as we had several opportunities of observing. We did not exchange adieus, but merely said *au revoir* until the little fête in the evening.

Our dragoman had buckled on his sword, and rolled a new kouffie round his tarbooz. These were symptoms of an extraordinary and solemn occurrence. We had a good dinner, that we might not yield to exhaustion in the midst of the ceremony. At seven o'clock in the evening everything was prepared. Small paper lamps had been artistically hung under the largest of our tents ; everything had been foreseen and provided for. Our beds and trunks arranged in rows answered the purpose of orchestra and balcony stalls, for the numerous spectators upon whom we counted. On the left, in the corner, the place of honour among Mussulmans, was the imperial box ; on the right, in front, the Municipal Council, a carpet folded in two for our chief and us ; all round, seated on the aforesaid articles of furniture, the attendants on the Municipal Council, and the relatives and friends of the dancing-women. In the background our

servants and camel-drivers, packed together like sardines, formed one of the most picturesque portions of the strange picture.

The lamps were burning, like ourselves, with impatience, when Hasné, the dancer, made her *entrée* in a most impetuous fashion, draped in a long blue robe spangled with gold, and caught up at the girdle by fringes of embroidered silk—a dress which added strangely to her wild aspect ; a piece of yellow stuff knotted on the top of her head formed the oddest conceivable combination with the innumerable plaits which fell upon her shoulders, and some of which were gathered together upon her forehead by thin gold rings. The metallic sound of the napoleons which chinked in her hair, and the harsh cries which preluded her first steps ; the barbarous instruments of the musicians who began their accompaniment at once ; all these strange noises lent a diabolical effect to the entire novelty of the scene. The orchestra was composed of three instruments, as singular in their way as the dance which they were about to accompany : the *dasabouka*, an earthenware drum, the *kémengéh*, a sort of two-stringed violoncello, and the *zoumara*, a double shepherd's pipe, which made us think of the shepherd kings.

Our best carpets had been carefully spread over the space reserved for the dancers. The *artiste* required no pressing; at the first notes of the dasabouka, Hâsné bounded into the centre of the tent. Animated, no doubt, by the numerous audience, encouraged by the princely bakshishs which we had promised her, and perhaps stimulated by the presence of the Municipal Council, she treated us to the utmost refinements of the chorographic art. Her brilliant eyes shot out lightnings, and, on a given signal, the dance began.

Slow and cadenced in her motions at first, the dancer hardly moved from the spot to which her feet seemed to be fastened; then, the rhythm of the music quickening a little, minute hurried steps seconded the indescribable inflections of her whole body, and as the musicians played more and more quickly, the gestures, the contortions, the least movements of the arms and the head of the dancer became more feverish and wild. When she reached the paroxysm of this rhythmical epileptic fit, she sank down, and, huddled together on her knees, threw herself into wondrously passionate and picturesque attitudes. There certainly was infinite grace in the way in which she seemed to yield and abandon herself to these

nervous convulsions. She combined the suppleness of the serpent with the elegance of the gazelle.

Such was the spectacle upon which we gazed, enraptured, for a whole hour, and rewarded with applause, bonbons, oranges, araki, and bakshishs. It was an immense success, and Hasné must have surpassed herself on that occasion, to judge by the delirium of admiration into which she threw her entire audience, and especially two of our camel-drivers, who formed the most amusing group it has been our fortune to behold. Each of these men was blind, of one eye, a common misfortune which had no doubt drawn them together; and it was not mere chance which had placed them side by side in this travelling amphitheatre. Araki and the music had already prepared them to manifest their sensations in the most unreserved way. But when Hasné let herself fall on the carpet like a wounded lioness, their enthusiasm burst all bounds. One of them took the head of the other between his hands and swung it round to and fro, with actual howls of satisfaction. He seemed to wish to pull it off, and fling it like a bouquet to the dancer; while the man whose head was thus made to beat time to the music, exhibited the utmost pleasure. At the end of the performance,

the two turbans, which, at first, had merely hung over the ears of their wearers, fell off, amid the wildest gestures, and nothing could exceed the comical effect of those two naked, one-eyed heads, kissing each other frantically, to express their common delight.

But everything comes to an end. The lamps began to smoke, and this was accepted as a signal for a general leave-taking, after many salutations on all sides. The breakages were few, our servants were delighted, and we had secured the esteem of the Municipal Council: everything had happened for the best. The dancer had been conducted home, in triumph, mounted on the very best ass of our stud. She was quite satisfied with our liberality, it seemed, and indeed we were not long without experiencing the effects of her lively gratitude.

At five o'clock on the following morning, we were aroused from the sleep which we certainly had earned, by a murmur of female voices. Hasné and her friends had come to see us! They were kept quiet for a while with coffee, and then they passed the morning with us very gaily. We could not talk to them, but bonbons and gesticulations did as well.

Hasné made it evident that she and her friends had taken a decided liking to our society, and as

this circumstance threatened to interfere very materially with the serious purpose of our sojourn in this most interesting village, we found it necessary to protect ourselves against our fair visitor, who peered into all our possessions and meddled with everything, in a spirit of insatiable curiosity. We persuaded her, by magnificent bakshishs, and by promising to visit her in her own den, to stay away, and our arguments were strengthened by our photographic experiments. She tasted our collodion, and was instantly and violently sea-sick, in consequence.

The village of Senouhrès resembles, on a larger scale, the village of Dachour, as we saw it for the first time. Senouhrès, built upon a plateau which is raised very much above the level of the remainder of the adjacent country, has the exact profile of a gigantic fortress. The inundations of the Nile are, as in the case of Dachour, the sole cause of this peculiar situation. At the epoch of the rising of the waters, the plain in which we encamped, sheltered by these magnificent palm-trees, forms an immense lake, which, it appears, extends to the extremity of the wood against which our tents were pitched. The successive elevation and lowering of these lakes produce a regular and slow

degradation in the form of the ground which gives a peculiar aspect to the whole country.

Immense plateaus of earth in superposed layers form the counter forts of this village, the roots of the palm-trees help to consolidate these natural ramparts, which the water saps and displaces every year a little. Whether the base of this red mountain be a mass of indestructible rock, or whether it offer no guarantee of solidity, the village, nevertheless, presents throughout its whole extent the aspect of a fortified city entirely built in stone, from the loftiest minaret of its little mosques to the base of its walls.

Chance placed us in front of the thronged passage which leads from the plain to the village, across the ford ; this road led directly to the market, which accounted for its animation. The women of Senouhrès seemed to have chosen this place to draw water in, perhaps because the stream is more limpid there than elsewhere, perhaps because their curiosity about our camp made them temporarily faithless to the other springs of the district. However that may be, from sunrise to sunset hundreds of women and young girls came down to the water, in long procession, with all the majesty of vestals going to the sacrifice. Among their number some were very

pretty, and their light robes and thin veils suffered us to verify the fact sufficiently.

They were in no wise disconcerted by our observation, but went on with all the operations of water-drawing, in the most unembarrassed manner. As each woman arrives at the pool, a neighbour helps to lift the water-jar down from the little cushion on which it stands on the bearer's head, and which preserves its equilibrium. The fresh arrival looks carefully into the water, raises her dress above her knee, ties it to her girdle with one end of the veil which covers her head, and rinses her jar for the first time—an operation which is performed with a supple and picturesque gesture. Holding the jar in one hand, the bearer rubs it briskly with the other, fills and empties it several times in succession, to make sure of its cleanliness, then, at the risk of losing her footing, she advances into the water, sometimes to the height of her girdle, to fill the jar from the limpid centre of the stream.

In this concluding operation the women have to contend with the violence of the current, making rapid and graceful movements, and needing no little dexterity in emerging with their jars full of water. At this crisis the assistance of a friend is graciously ac-

cepted, either to help them over the difficult step, or to support the heavy load of the amphora. The jar-bearer bends down, gathering as well as may be about her the soiled, wet skirts of her dress, while her neighbour, in one single action, lifts the burthen out of her hands and places it, dexterously balanced, on her friend's head, where a pad has been made for it with strips of linen. They wait for one another, until the picturesque procession which had come with empty jars, returns, telling itself off by streets and houses. Their steps are slower, for the way is steep, and the difficulties and little incidents of the road animate and amuse the file of more or less veiled statues. Perhaps a dog frightens them, or a child trips and falls, and they seize upon any pretext for the prettiest embarrassment and the most graceful grouping.

It would have been pushing indiscretion too far to have asked ten minutes' motionlessness from these pretty creatures, so that we could only make a rapid sketch of their most frequent movements. One day, however, very early in the morning, I came upon three of them, at a corner of a group of palm-trees, washing their clothes in a stream. I installed myself unperceived by them, and should certainly have made capital portraits, had I not been spied by one of the

nymphs. She was about sixty, was evidently keeping watch over the others, and had no sooner caught sight of me than she began to pelt me with showers of stones. This fit of modesty was perfectly legitimate on her part, considering the lesson in comparative osteology which I might have learned from her and the stems of the palm-trees which sheltered me from her projectiles. In her fury, her naked ribs looked like steps of stairs. She abandoned herself to violent gestures of rage. I left her in peace, and went on my way, observing that her companions did not manifest any such contempt as hers for the fine arts.

I returned to the camp by the longest way, as I wanted to get at the heart of the palm-forest which I had been contemplating admiringly for many days. As I was turning the corner of a thick clump of brushwood, I found myself confronted by the most horrible animal of the large Egyptian collection, the *naja* serpent, more commonly known as 'the snake in spectacles.' He was short and thick, of a most repulsive aspect; his eyes were surrounded with black circles which made them look enormously large, and fully explained the name conferred upon his tribe. Happily for me he was in an inoffensive stage of his existence, owing to the process of digesting some

animal larger than himself which he had just swallowed. His body, swollen to excess, seemed to have been shortened, and resembled an immense toad with a short tail. He was grovelling in the centre of the narrow path, and seemed to be waiting either for fresh food or a physician's visit. Nevertheless, my first movement was one of terror, and having narrowly escaped treading on him, I intended a speedy retreat, not knowing but that the monster would pursue me; but, on looking back, revolver in hand, I perceived him still motionless in the path. Then I began to think that perhaps he was dead, and, ashamed of my terror, I retraced my steps. I saw two Arabs coming, like myself, from the village, so I went to them, and explained by my gestures, that there was something ugly in the road. They understood me; cut two sticks from a palm-tuft, and advanced towards the serpent, who was now wriggling and jumping feebly. The Arabs made signs to me that there was no danger, and I drew near. One of them took hold of the brute adroitly by his tail, which made him stretch himself out longer, but a blow from one of the sticks took his head off with the precision of a razor.

One of the Arabs slit the creature's stomach, and there we found the remains of several fowls on which

he had supped. This was the first time I had seen this horrible serpent, which is common enough in Upper Egypt, and which the ancient Egyptians worshipped as an emblem of royalty. The *naja*, in his concentrated form, during the period of digestion, is frequently represented in the jewels and ornaments found in Ancient Egypt. The Arabs urged me to keep the skin of this one, but nothing would induce me to touch the slimy thing; indeed, the mere thought of the horrid reptile made me shudder for long after.

We were to leave Senouhrès on the morrow, and we paid parting visits to the sheik and the notables. The dancers, especially Hasné, came to express their sorrow at our departure. No doubt it was serious; our sojourn had been profitable to them, for we had bought them several dresses and veils. Hasné was profoundly affected, and we wished to keep her to breakfast; but her peculiar habits at table obliged us to renounce the idea, and, in order to keep her quiet, we showed her photographs. These constituted our great resource, and, indeed, we frequently resorted to them ourselves when the bill of fare was meagre, or we had to wait for the soup.

One of us, a modern Hercules, possessed a superb

pair of dogskin gloves, which were of the greatest use to him in this country, where one must be always riding either a camel or an ass. Seized with a happy idea, we put these gloves on Hasné's hands. I never saw anything more comical than this woman's little hands lost in the enormous red gloves. Her delight was indescribable ; she was prouder of the gloves than of all the necklaces we could offer her ; she ran from one tent to another, uttering cries of satisfaction ; she showed her hands to everybody, and it was only by telling her that the gloves were enchanted, and would bring her ill-luck, that we could induce her to give them up. After tender farewells, and liberal bakshishs, we set out the following morning for Medinet, the most important town in the province of Fayoum.

SKETCH VIII.

A PRIMITIVE FOREST.

Fidémîne-el-Fayoum — Biblical Hospitality — A Pharaoh's Rat —
Respect to the Flies—Return from Market.

WE had to pass twice through Medinet, first in going to Fidémîne, and afterwards in returning thence. Strictly speaking, we could have taken another road, but a melancholy circumstance rendered this retracing of our way necessary. One of our party was taken ill, and it became necessary to send him to Cairo for medical treatment. The route from Senouhrès was long and laborious, although it lay through cultivated lands, and we were quite sheltered from the sandstorms. The innumerable canals which intersect this part of the province render the road an actual labyrinth; and, as there is no plan of them, a native guide is indispensable. Without one we must have lost our way, or gone over the distance tenfold.

In the district which lies near the great canal, called 'The Canal of Joseph,' vegetation obtains its most extraordinary proportions, and surpasses the

most exaggerated conceptions. In many places we passed under actual arches of verdure, formed by the enormous branches of trees and shrubs which we are accustomed to see of much smaller dimensions. The orange and lemon trees grow here to the size of our old oaks, forests of cactus and aloes spread beyond sight along the roads, and form an impenetrable rampart. After having followed these marvellous roads, we came out upon one of the widest branches of the Canal of Joseph. This canal is one of the most important works in all Egypt. Very curious legends are connected with its construction and its Biblical origin. On approaching Medinet, we observed a degree of animation such as we had not previously noticed on approaching any town or village. The rank of the locality was indicated by soldiers in uniform, and horsemen splendidly equipped, and its social and commercial importance was injurious on the picturesque side, to the local colour of the place. In fact, it was very difficult to induce the inhabitants to permit us to encamp in the environs of the town. The people of Medinet are fast losing the gentleness and rural simplicity in their manners and dress which essentially characterise the Fellah population.

Our dear invalid, accompanied by a trusty servant,

was placed in good hands, and, while he turned his steps to Cairo, we set out for the village of Fidémine, which is generally neglected by travellers, and has, therefore, preserved a rare and curious stamp of primitiveness.

We were gradually ascending the Canal of Joseph, and having arrived at vast savannahs of vegetation of unknown kinds, we plunged into a series of roads across the woods, where Robinson Crusoe might have believed himself to be in his island. Enormous grasses and lianes stretched from side to side, binding together the palm and other trees which continually barred our passage by their gnarled and knotted trunks. Our baggage-camels had great difficulty in steering through the thick brushwood, and night was coming on. Through the wood we went, unheeding the ascent, until we found ourselves at a very great height above the level of the rest of the country. In fact we had attained an elevated plateau, but the extraordinary vegetation had prevented our perceiving it. At length we reached the edge of an immense precipice, with a running stream below, of which we caught glimpses between the trunks of the palms and aloes clothing the sides of the ravine. We had then to accomplish a descent, difficult alike for our animals and

ourselves. We were on foot, holding the camels by their bridles, and guiding them as well as we could. This long and difficult climb reversed made us understand the considerable height we had reached ; and when we had come down, as it seemed to us, to the depths of the earth, we had simply attained the level of a charming rivulet, and the picturesque entry of the village of Fidémine.

It was easy to see, by merely looking at the banks of this little river, that it must occasionally assume the importance of a torrent. Uprooted palms, rocks laid bare, and several varieties of grasses indicate the variations caused by the increase and rapidity of its course. Our tents were pitched upon the edge of the limpid water, with a background of enormous palms, aloes, and other trees strange in form and grouping. It was a virgin forest. Except the few straggling houses of the village which we had observed across the ravine through the trees, there was nothing to indicate the presence of human beings in the place. At our approach animals of all sorts, the sole tenants of the woods, had retreated, uttering yells. No human being had we yet seen ; and because of this solitude we organised a night-watch, which was only too necessary in the interest of our fowls, if we might judge

from the concert by wild beasts which deafened us all night. Were they wolves or only jackals? The acoustic properties of the ravine rendered these cries and howls very imposing, and, aided by imagination, we pleased ourselves with the notion that we were surrounded by ferocious brutes. Most likely they were wretched outcast dogs, but I felt it a duty to charge my gun, and I know several of our party never closed their eyes all night, but lay watching with their revolvers at hand. Nothing happened, however, more terrible than the loss of our night's rest.

The next morning, all the wild beasts having disappeared, we took a delicious bath in the same stream in which we had pictured to our imagination a band of lions drinking in the night season, in order to excite the hunger which we were to satisfy. We were enjoying our bath, and prolonging it rather absurdly, when a visit from the sheik of Fidémine in person was announced. He was escorted by his suite, and the older members of his family. These were not the jolly good fellows of Senouhrès, but genuine Arab Fellaheen, as simple and as grave in their least gestures as the others were lively and familiar.

The reception was cordial and touching. In the

true Biblical fashion of hospitality the young sheik had brought with him a greeting gift, though he was entirely ignorant of our means of returning his courteous generosity. The beautiful face of the young Arab, the gentle dignity of the old men who accompanied him, the whole picture of simple and primitive manners was admirably framed by virgin forest, and set in the midst of free, unconquered nature. The gift consisted of an immense basin full of rice, in which were inserted several legs of fowls, powdered with saffron—a pilau which is the most ordinary of oriental dishes, and invariable on official occasions. We invited the sheik to seat himself and to accept our bill of fare for the morrow.

We were at table when a singular circumstance occurred which gave this little festival a fresh charm. The conversation, confined on our part to expressions of admiration for the beautiful country, and to questions addressed to the sheik, concerning his name, and the number of his camels, decidedly lacked variety. He answered us with most natural precision and simplicity.

‘How long is it,’ our chief asked him, ‘since you have been visited by European travellers?’

At this question the sheik pondered for a moment

like a man who wished to answer as exactly as if Mahomet himself had questioned him.

‘Five years,’ he replied. ‘My father was sheik of Fidémine at that time ; I was very young, but I have faithfully preserved the remembrance.’

He then entered into details of the season, the date, and the circumstances, which made it evident that he was unconsciously speaking of our chief, and of his second visit to Egypt.

Then, after a pause, he continued : ‘My father told me that, five years before that time, strangers had come to our village, and had hunted there. Some of them installed themselves in front of our houses, seated before a little box, and occupied themselves with a kind of work which we did not understand.’ This unknown occupation was painting in oils, and one of the travellers who had sat absorbed before a little box which he held on his knees, by the aid of a large parasol, was Gérôme on his first journey ; a periodical comet who will probably be visible at Fidémine in 1873, since he passes once in five years.

We had only to follow the capricious windings of the fairy-like stream, in order to make acquaintance with the country. On ascending its right shores we arrived at the village. Descending it on our right we

plunged into labyrinths of rocks, parasites, aloes, and palm-trees, where only serpents could get about freely. The wild creatures would naturally resort to this thick covert, and we observed in the soil the footprints of many animals quite novel to us.

The band of hunters could not resist such a temptation, and, booted almost up to their shoulders, they plunged into the ravine in search of the tenants of these impenetrable woods. Strange cries and caterwaulings put them quickly on the trail of many doubtless interesting beasts, but the difficulty of moving about among precipices, cacti, and lianes relaxed their ardour and defeated their efforts. An enormous 'Pharaoh's rat,' and some many-plumaged birds, were the result of this battue in a virgin forest. Judging by this rat, the cats of Sesostri must have been prodigious. The animal has no analogy with the European rat, and nothing justifies its being called a rat, except its long head and pointed snout. The 'Pharaoh's rat' is amphibious but not dangerous, and swarms in those countries which are both hot and moist. He does considerable damage to the vegetation by nibbling the roots of the trees on the banks of the streams, the canals, and watercourses of all kinds. The Arabs hunt him unre-

mittingly ; but, notwithstanding their efforts, the animal is a positive scourge in several countries.

The next day, on which the market was held, afforded us an opportunity of witnessing a most animated scene, in which all the most striking types of the Fellah population were assembled. The Fellah family was fully represented in its primitive character : the man tall and strong, with a fine expressive face ; the woman small, her movements full of vivacity ; the child generally sickly looking, and, until his tenth year, entirely unclothed. In Egypt there is a singular disparity between the admirable proportions of the men, and the mean, almost decrepid appearance of the women. The latter is a sad and fatal result of the climate and of the customs of the country, alike enervating, and by which these absurdly precocious constitutions are exhausted before womanhood, as we should regard it, has begun.

The men, who are clean shaven from motives of cleanliness, preserve a lock of hair on the top of the head, which is called by the sacred name of Mahomet. The Arab will rarely uncover his head, and studiously avoids allowing this ridiculous ornament to be seen.

Ophthalmia has become a veritable pestilence in this country. It disfigures half the population, and so

multiplies blindness, either total or of one eye, that there is a proverbial saying that, among three Arabs, there are only four eyes. Uncleanliness and incorrigible carelessness second the ravages of this melancholy infirmity; flies, from which children are in no way protected, settle in clusters upon the unfortunate little beings, and turn their heads into hives. Their mothers will not touch them, because, though Mahomed enjoined ablutions upon true believers, he also interdicted the killing of flies.

When one sees that the mothers of these poor creatures will not be induced to clean their poor faces, one asks whether they are mad, or barbarously cruel? But they are neither; on the contrary, they are inspired by maternal love, and this monstrous superstition is explained by the religion of the Prophet.

According to the Mussulmans, this deplorable malady is 'something on account' of the inevitable sum of misfortunes reserved by fate for every child of man in this world. The Fellah woman almost rejoices in the thought that this dread disease is infinitely preferable to other misfortunes of which her child might be the victim, but from which he will be preserved by thus early paying his tribute to the

sum of misfortunes due to him. Rice, corn, maize, and sugar-cane are the principal products sold in the open air market, with the exception of oranges and fruits of all kinds, with which baskets are laden, and which are given away rather than sold. Asses, camels, and buffaloes serve the purpose of booths, and women do the work of market porters, while the proprietors smoke their chibouks, or drink their coffee, lying languidly on carpets or mats. There, as indeed everywhere in the East, woman plays the part of a domestic animal, condemned to the most difficult tasks, and those most ruinous to her delicate nature. This monstrous barbarism, consecrated by the Musulman religion, is yet far from disappearing from the East.

As I was returning from the market, I followed one of the branches of a rapid watercourse which divides the village. A carrion crow was perched on the top of one of the huge palm-trees which bordered the current; with no other motive than to test my want of skill, I fired at him, and to my astonishment hit him. His wing was broken, he fell into the water, and fought there against his lamentable fate, while I beheld the oddest possible duck hunt. Certain dogs and children, whose presence I had not

suspected, had observed me, and at once flung themselves into the river, in pursuit of the bird. Women strove to beat off the dogs with stones, and the children were whirled about by the current, while the crow fluttered from rock to rock. At last he was taken, and became the prey of the noisy rabble who had not shrank from a dangerous bath to secure such despicable game.

On the morrow, the young sheik came to bid us adieu, and we regretfully quitted this picturesque and wild country to return to Medinet.

SKETCH IX.

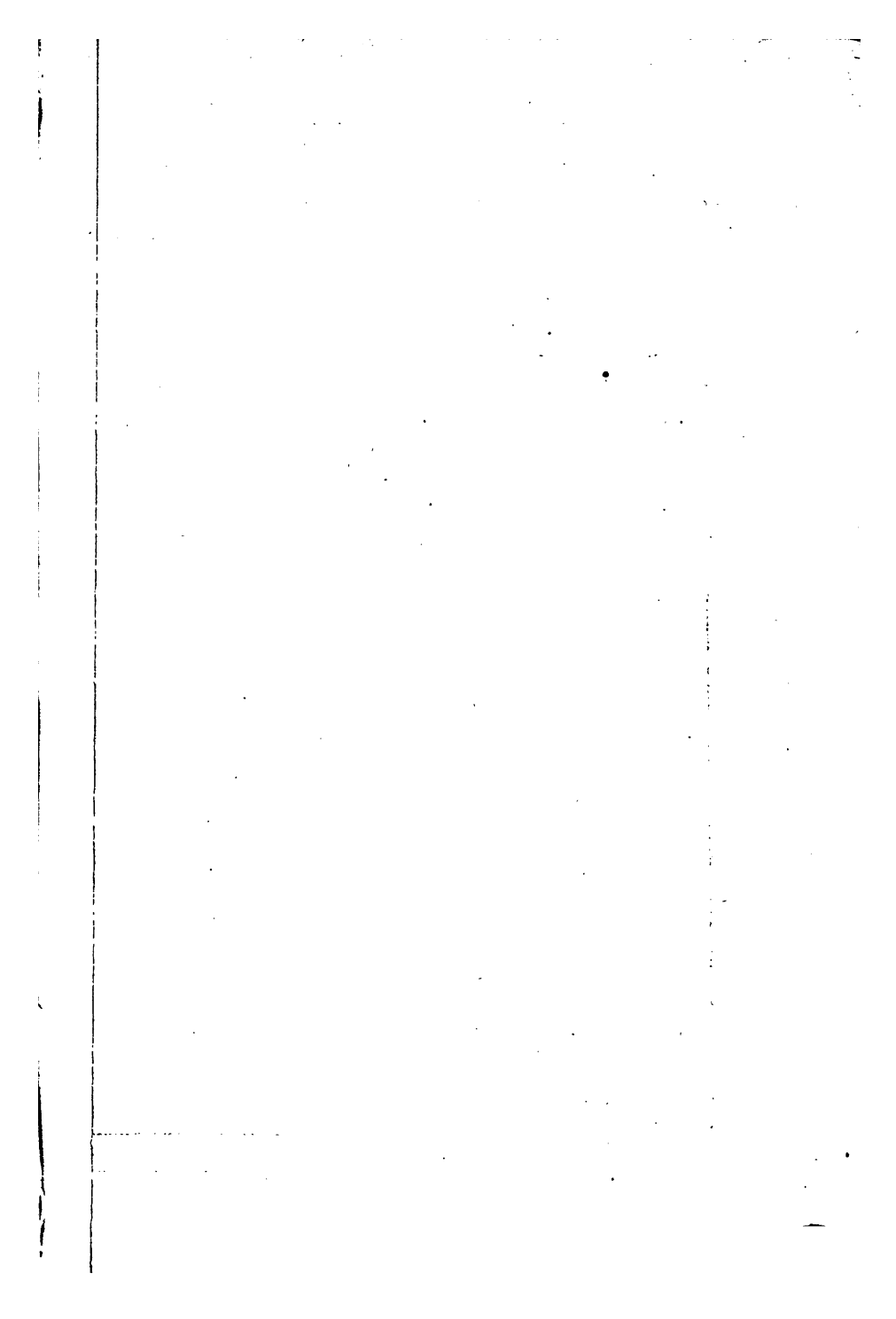
MEDINET-EL-FAYOUM.

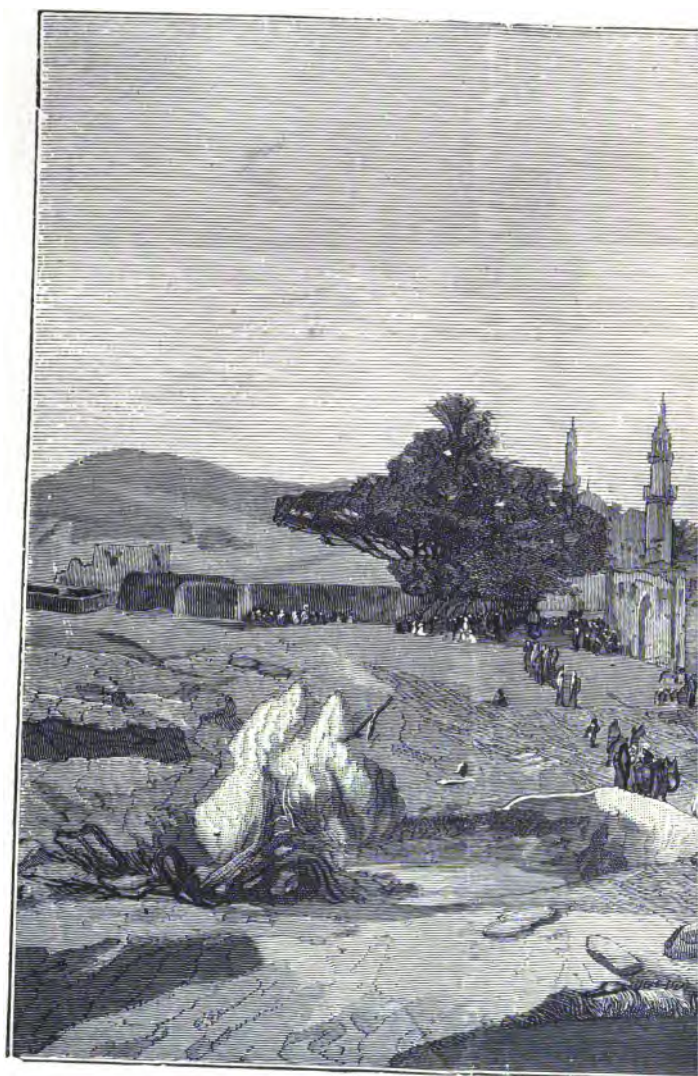
Joseph's Canal—Birket Keroun—Cinderella's Slipper—A pretty Pink Pebble.

MEDINET is the chief city of Fayoum, and its name is almost always associated with that of the province.

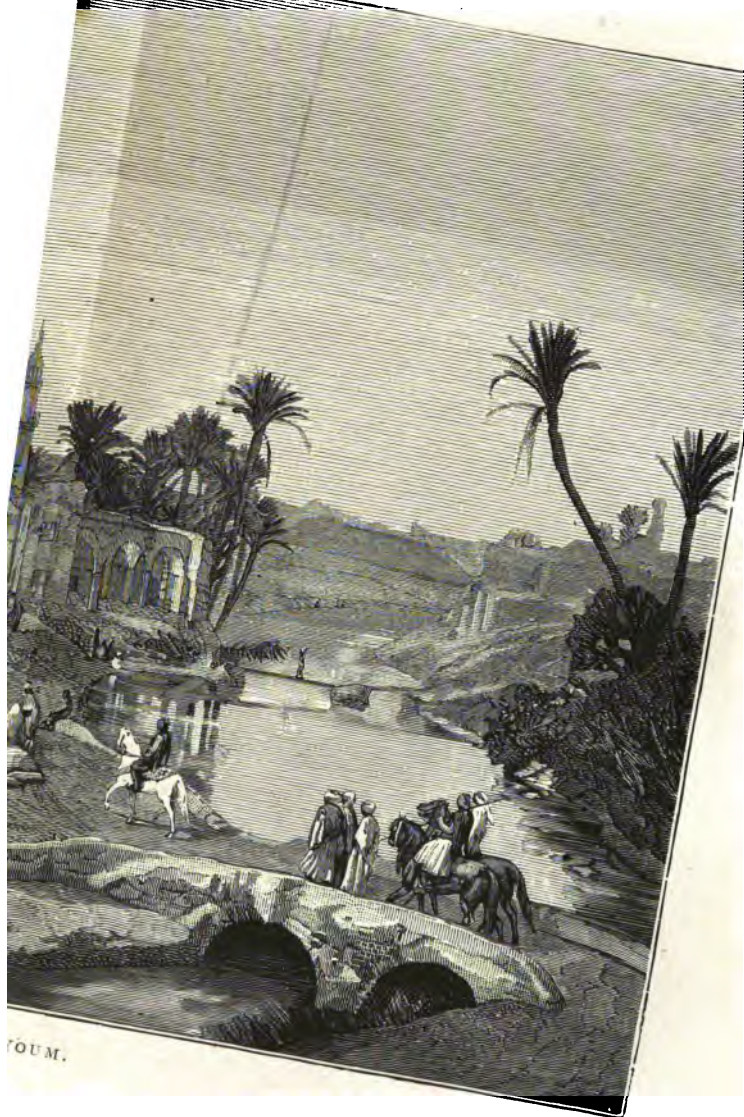
Medinet-el-Fayoum is very important from every point of view : commerce, industry, and culture are regulated and administered there by rule and even with a certain official formality. The Viceroy has a residence, and the traffic has something of the tumultuous character of that of Cairo.

The immense Joseph's Canal traverses the whole length of the city, and extends to Lake Birket Keroun, where it attains the proportions of a respectable river. It is so wide for a canal that men of science are not agreed upon its nature, some attributing it merely to the hand of man, and others holding it to be a derivative of the Nile. Whether Joseph had anything to do with the plan of it or not, or whether nature be its sole engineer, it is the principal

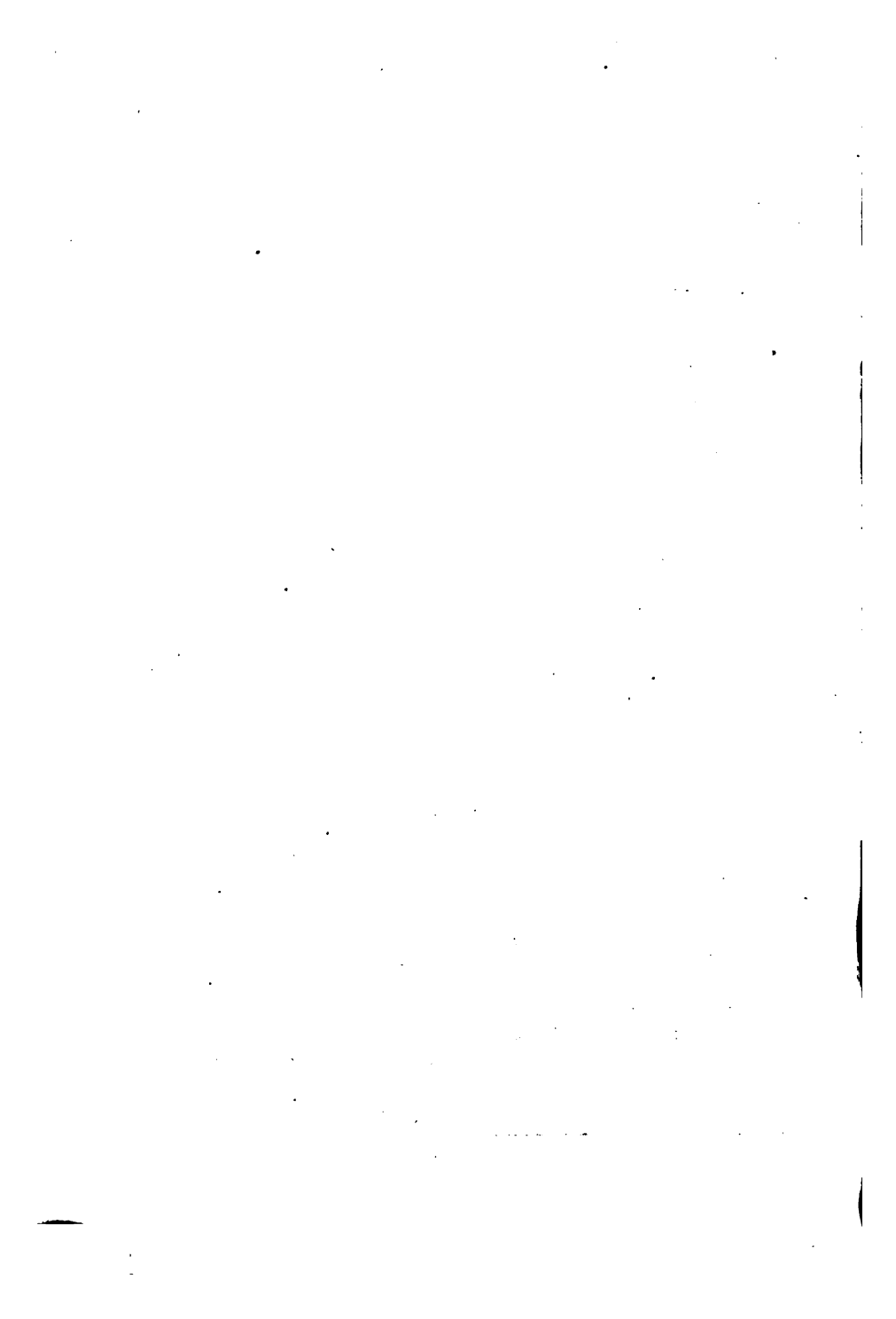




MEDINET-EL



FOUM.



artery of the traffic, and especially of the irrigation of the entire province from Lake Birket to the Nile. A distinguished engineer has given a most rational explanation of this famous Lake Mœris, so variously described by the best authorities. The entire province of Fayoum might have formed an immense lake during the epoch of the great inundations of the Nile; but the irregularity of the retreat of these annual inundations inspired the Egyptians with the idea of securing their results, under all circumstances, by dykes and canals. In fact, whether the overflow of the waters were insufficient, or dangerous by reason of its magnitude, the canals and trenches in the earth either doubled the value of the inundations, or moderated their excess. Fayoum, skilfully utilised, now, as a reservoir, now as a drain-pipe, became the regulator of the stream to which Egypt owes all its fertility.

There never could have been any justification of the enormous excavations which would have been rendered necessary by the construction of a lake. The gigantic walls which are found in different parts of the province are only the ancient dykes destined to restrain the waters of this natural lake, which was never dug by the hands of man, though

some ancient travellers will have it so. Another school of opinion assigns the merit of this great office to Birket Keroun; and several authors boldly give it the name of Lake Mœris. This lake is perfectly natural, and, according to the precise topographical observations of M. Linant Bey, it never could have played the marvellous part which has been falsely attributed to it; its configuration and its much lower level, relatively to the Nile, forbid all confusion on this point.

Even the historic name of Mœris is dubious. The Pharaoh to whom the great system of canals is generally attributed is Amenemha III., the sixth king of the twelfth dynasty, unless indeed he be somebody else, for opinions on the point are as numerous as palm-trees. According to Champollion a mere ordinary Thotmes is entitled to the honour of this wonderful work. Fayoum is derived from Pharoum or Phaïoum, which simply means a marsh.

Let us return to the bank of the great Canal of Joseph. Huge wherries and barques lay alongside the brick quay, waiting for their cargoes of grain and straw, the produce of the last harvest. Numerous caravans meet at this transport dépôt, and form a line of communication between Medinet and Cairo. The

first-rate importance of this locality has induced the Government to decide upon making a railway across the sand plains and sand hills of the Nile border, and the line is in course of formation. We were destined to a somewhat exciting acquaintance with it later ; but first, before I recount that experience, let us visit the town.

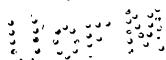
It is not Cairo, with its incalculable variety of buildings and costumes ; it is a large provincial town, where there are few loungers, but where there is plenty of animation in the streets, among the buyers and sellers of the cereals and the grasses of the country. An interminable bazaar, almost parallel with the canal, extends throughout the whole length of the town ; and in it we recognise the crowding and the variety of the shops at Cairo on a reduced scale. But both the inhabitants and the traders have a remarkable simplicity about them. Soldiers in uniform mingle with the crowd, and rather spoil the picturesque effect produced by the Fellahs, each clad in a long single robe of blue material, gathered at the waist by a girdle, and wearing a white turban, or a simple cap of brown or white felt.

It is probably a fortunate result of the influx of strangers, that the women of Medinet are more pretty

and less uncouth than those whom we had seen in the other parts of the province. Many of them dispense with the traditional veil, which ought to leave only their eyes visible, and dress their hair tastefully and coquettishly, besides adding to their customary blue robe silken scarfs of various brilliant shades, and ornaments in gold and silver of the finest workmanship. I was much struck with a superb pair of earrings which hung down heavily upon the neck of a rather pretty girl, and I ultimately succeeded in purchasing them, but at a high price. I began by following her, as, with the eternal water-pot on her head, she was wending her way to a fountain at the extremity of the grand bazaar. The rapidity with which she walked, and the increasing throng in the street, made me despair of being able to approach her. Feeling that she was followed, and not supposing that it was simply on account of her earrings, she hurried on, and slipped through the bazaar with wonderful celerity, obliging me to pursue her fleet footsteps in a half-trot, half-gallop, infinitely absurd, but impossible to relinquish under pain of being hopelessly distanced. I was on the point of relinquishing the pursuit, when a good fairy came to my aid. In her haste, one of her slippers, which did not in the least resemble Cin-

derella's, came off ; she was forced to pause, and stoop to pick it up, but I was beforehand with her, caught up the slipper, and holding it like a fan, was about to present it to her with the utmost grace and politeness. But she did not like this proceeding at all. Misinterpreting my natural and harmless gallantry, she fled from me, with one slipper on, uttering sounds which were far from melodious. Not wishing to pass for a thief, and anxious to remove an injurious impression of my conduct from her mind, I ran after her, holding the yellow slipper in my hand. She showed no signs of flagging, neither did I, and we should certainly have gone on to the third cataract if she had not been tired at the first. But, when she reached the fountain she sat down, consented to take her heel-less boot from my hand, and even offered me a drink of water from her jar. Although my profile is not like his, I reminded myself of Eliezar with Rebecca, but instead of bringing her jewels and asking for her hand, I had no concern except with her foot, and I had come to ask her for her ornaments.

She softened rapidly, for I had shown her one of those irresistible sixpenny neckties of which I always carried a supply about with me, and thanks to this western talisman, I was able to begin negotiations



immediately. *Bekamfi* said I, pointing to her long ear-rings. She replied by a torrent of words, but as I did not understand her calculations, I showed her an Arab coin worth about ten francs. She took it, unfastened one of her earrings, and prepared to go away. This was not enough. I wanted to have the other. I succeeded in purchasing it for a similar price, and returned in triumph to the bazaar. The affair had evidently pleased her, for she became very friendly, and insisted on giving me her yellow slippers into the bargain. I accepted them, placed them next my heart, and escaped from my Cinderella.

I then went in search of some of my friends, who, gravely seated in the centre of a tobacco-shop, seemed to be holding a council of war on a question of the highest importance. The matter was indeed worthy of consideration, for it was no less than a small granite sphinx, of the purest form and the finest workmanship, without the smallest flaw. This gem of antique sculpture had charmed us all, and we most seriously discussed the condition of its purchase. The polish of the pink granite, and the astonishing preservation of this little masterpiece had struck us so much that at first we doubted its birth certificate. But one of us, who is a great amateur, and an expert

archæologist assured us of the real value of the sphinx. However, the price was beyond us, and the weight of the little monolithic Pharaoh, made us doubtful about the possibility of bringing him home to Bougival. How often we have regretted him since then, for we have had ample opportunities of learning his true value, and appreciating the opportunity which we had lost ! Few of the sculptures in the Egyptian museum at the Louvre produce upon one so charming an impression as did that little sphinx, which is probably still in the recesses of the shop at Medinet, unless he has been bought by an Englishman, who has had a second made to match him, for a pair of fire-dogs of the 23rd dynasty.

Like all the towns in the province, Medinet is largely populated by Copts, who are Christians like ourselves, a curious remnant of the most ancient people of the country, before the establishment of El Islam in Egypt. These Copts preserve some of the ancient Greek rites in the external practices of their religion. The Mass is oddly distorted, and the most salient feature of their worship is the eating of pork and the drinking of wine under the very nose of Mahomet. An Italian monk, the last remaining member of a community which existed at Medinet,

regarded us, being foreigners, as his compatriots, and paid us a most friendly visit. He gave us some very curious details about the Christian population of Medinet in general, and his proselytes in particular. He invited us to go and see his little presbytery, which was like the house of one of our village *curés*, and he was affected almost to tears when we spoke to him in Italian. He gave us fruit from his garden, and wine from his little vineyard. In our turn we presented him with a jar of Liebig's extract of meat. This residuum of beef reminded him of his fatherland, and of that beloved bouillon which he had not even heard spoken of for forty-four years, for beef, bouilli, and beefsteak are as unknown in Egypt as crocodile cutlets in Paris. Buffalo is not eatable, and the Egyptian bullock, with horns reversed, and twisted hoofs, is not a tempting resource. Thanks to the importance of Medinet, we experienced considerable difficulty in finding a site for our tents. We unconsciously placed ourselves back to back with a public laundry, and a slaughter-house, and had to decamp immediately. It was not easy to find another place, for the proprietors were not enthusiastic in their welcome. We were sadly following one of the

windings of the Joseph's canal when our dragoman solved the difficulty.

A vast field, bordered with cactus and perfectly enclosed, presented a delicious aspect, and a capital soil. The centre of this attractive spot was occupied by large stacks of dried maize, arranged with great care. But a dragoman with a real sword does not enter into such details; he merely made a sign, and ass-drivers, camel-drivers, and servants all set to work, the hedge was escalated, and the maize stacks were dismantled as if by enchantment. In a minute the space was clear, and our tents arose peacefully in the midst of this strangely-won field of battle.

We were a little uneasy about this socialistic proceeding, and the point of view of the proprietor. But our dragoman, whose obstinacy and imagination were alike sublime and oriental, determined to be beforehand with the danger, so he went to the owner of the field, and explained that the Prince whom he was escorting, did him infinite honour by condescending to take up his abode in the middle of the highly favoured field. So charmed was the proprietor by this flattering preference, that, if it had not been all done already, he would have helped our ass and camel-driver to throw his bundles of straw

over the hedge, where our camels were tranquilly nibbling them.

We made several excursions round the city. The extraordinary fertility of this portion of the province surpasses all that we could have imagined ; several harvests are reaped every year ; clover, for instance, is cut three times, and grows to a height unknown in the richest European soil. There, the arable land, fertilised by the deposit from the Nile, does not need the repose which is so necessary to our cultivated soil. Hardly has the corn been reaped before the plough prepares the ground for a new seed-sowing.

The plough is generally drawn by a camel or an ass. The buffalo is especially reserved for working the wells and saquièhs. The soil is so saturated by constant irrigation that it is perfectly easy work to till it ; the plough is not the massive lump of iron which, in our fields, seems to tear up the bowels of the earth ; here it is a simple piece of wood which passes over furrows made beforehand for it. Everything in this wonderful country seems like a dream. Where we set up steam-machines, the fellah scratches the ground with a match.

The bullock, common in Syria, is much more rare in this part of Egypt, and is very small, with twisted

hoofs and very long horns, turned back like those of the antelope. An enormous hump on the back of the neck seems to be a natural deformity, but is useful in supporting the yoke which is fixed to the head. We saw only a few of these bullocks in the province of Fayoum, and they are still more rare in Upper Egypt and on the borders of the Nile. Their colour is tawny or pale yellow, sometimes there is one almost white. Is this unsightly beast really the legitimate descendant of Apis? *Grammatici certant*. At all events, he is very ugly. The hieroglyphic paintings, and the small figures which represent the sacred bull, have but little analogy with this odd-looking creature. In this country, which has always been occupied by pastoral peoples, we met very few flocks, and they did not come up to their ancient reputation. The little black sheep have long heads, rather like goats.

The Arab, who is not fastidious, finds a sufficient resource in the wool of his camels for his coarse and simple necessities in the matter of clothing. The finer stuffs which we have seen the fellahs, and especially the women, wear, come from Cairo, and are sometimes importations from Europe. Blue is the almost uniform colour of all the garments worn in these

countries. The short gown of the ass-drivers, the long dress of the fellahs, and the square tunic of the camel-drivers are invariably of this blue shade, which, in the country, brings out the pink and grey tones of the earth admirably. The light dresses of the women (habbara) and their long veils, of which we bought a number of specimens at Senouhrés, are of a much deeper blue than the other costumes. These finer stuffs, striped with silk and wool have the suppleness, transparency, and lustre of the material which Parisian dress-makers call grenadine. It moulds itself charmingly to the figure, and is a mere conventional veil, which, if coquettishly adjusted, enhances the beauties it is supposed to conceal. The only garment worn by any Egyptian child is his skin, which usually seems tight. The climate and a vegetable diet render them precociously and painfully fat; the result of which is a general puffiness that makes them ludicrous until they are about eleven, when they begin to assume something like proportion. Notwithstanding all the charms of our sojourn at Medinet, and the series of ready-made pictures which we met at every step, and which seemed to be looking out for us at the corner of every street and bazar, our expedition to Sinai and to Petra had

been so arranged that we must begin to think of leaving Fayoum. The province is a delicious place, by reason of its essentially gentle and primitive character, its biblical inhabitants, and the wildness of its vegetation wherever man's hand has not meddled with it. It is a true terrestrial paradise in which pastoral peoples have succeeded each other, all whose efforts have been confined to the culture of their fields. They were the real civilisers of Egypt—these intelligent rustics of the universe, who wanted nothing to aid their progress but the laws of nature seconded by the toil of man.

We were about to quit this living page from the book of Genesis, to plunge into the turmoil of the sickly and restless world which has already invaded Cairo, and undertaken, by dint of steam and electricity to change the scene from that of the Thousand and One Nights, to a copy of the Boulevard Malesherbes and the Rue Tronchet. Let us begin with steam, let us send away our asses, our camels, and our baggage, and let us go and take our tickets at the station of Médinet-el-Fayoum.

In the first place, the terminus? Well, there was not one then, but there must be one by this time, with fine railings painted green, and brand new clerks

STATE OF EGYPT.

... it was in our time, a terminus would have been picked up the train just as it was, with all the docility of a ... stations marked on the ... The stations ... where, according to the ... facility. Supposing a ... a wild flower, to shoot a ... he stops the train, and ... perfectly satisfied. Probably, as he sits in the carriages, he may ... and eat his breakfast by ...

... in the morning, we got into the ... administrative ceremony ... of our carriage. But we had ... hours, which, thanks to our ... we never parted, was not lost ... sketches of our neighbours, ... under pretence of taking notes ... The good mission-priest came ... we left, and he bade us adieu with ... voice as he thanked us for the ... which we had cheered his exist- ... of an hour, the train, com-

posed of boxes of the queerest shapes, seemed to us to have some notion of moving. It was not a feint this time, we really were off, carried away for many a day from the beautiful land which we quitted with regret, our boxes and our hearts alike full of the most charming *souvenirs*.

SKETCH X.

RETURN TO CAIRO.

A Locomotive in Trouble—Gyzeh by Gaslight—Choubrah Rondah—
The Nilometer—Bazaars and Mosques—The Persian Ambassador
—Women whom one sees, Women whom one does not see, and
Women whom one is sorry for having seen—The Departure of the
Carpet—A Little Soap—Not adieu, but au revoir.

THE line of the railroad is almost parallel to that of the demarcation between the sands and the cultivated land ; thus, from a certain point of view, we must not complain too much of the slowness of our funny locomotive. On our left the white line of the desert began to appear ; on our right was the most luxuriant vegetation and widely varied landscapes. It was a real magic lantern, and we were jolting along pleasantly in a kind of contented dream, when a loud alarm-whistle signalled a station, meaning an accident. First interlude ! No more coals ! This was the chief cause. A lot of children were sent running to the nearest village to pick up everything that they could find, and with their contributions were mixed palm-trunks, bushes, and camel's dung ; then, the

stomach of the engine being somewhat recruited, we were off again, liberally smoked by the engine, which was unable to digest the unaccustomed diet.

After a while came another blast of the whistle, another station, without an accident this time, and a real station, though there was no sign of any kind of construction or of an official uniform. The village on whose account this stoppage is made lies beside the Nile; it is called *El Wastah*, and it is a pretty little place, symmetrical, well-regulated, and almost clean. It is a point of junction for the river navigation with the Medinet line. There the barques discharge their cargoes, and take on board the merchandise brought by the trains. Consequently, an immense number of camels are employed there, for the transit service between the Nile and the railway.

This station was not a joke; we had to wait two hours, which we passed very agreeably in breakfasting under the palm-trees, in company with all the dogs of the village, who ranged themselves respectfully in a circle around us, soliciting some remains of duck or chicken. Escorted by our guests, we then inspected *El Wastah*, admirably situated on the bank of the Nile; the barques, prettily grouped, give the little place the animated look of a little trading port. We were

invited by its master to enter a very pretty little wherry, but as the pasteboard train was waiting for us, we had to quit these enchanted shores, and get into our box again.

Departure! blast of whistle! something wrong again—stoppage—once more no coal, and we are out on a wild plain as far from Gyzeh as from El Wastah. We were getting used to it, so we quietly stepped out of the carriage with our guns. The driver informed us that he had just enough fuel to take him, on his engine, in search of a supply. This motion was adopted without any of the passengers having been consulted: he quietly left us there and set off, accompanied by some fat men in clean tarboozes, who seemed to be great personages, but who did not fare much better for the privilege, for in a very short time the engine came to a dead stop in the middle of the sand. No doubt it was one of those fat privileged functionaries who went on foot to Gyzeh, and induced the Council of Administration to send for the locomotive in the first place, and secondly to consider the case of the travellers, who were starving in the open country. We had had to hold out against famine for six hours. Some of us went off to shoot, and brought back a duck, a rat, and eight sparrows, which

were hailed with acclamations. Our ingenious dragoon had skilfully secreted some precious bits of coal which had fallen from the engine, and we succeeded in fabricating a sort of supper with the remnants of our morning meal. The night had come; the doors were shut; and we were snoring, careless of the future, never thinking that another train coming up behind might possibly run into us. Mahomet protected us. At about ten o'clock at night, a locomotive, preceded by the piercing sound of its whistle, hooked itself to our compartments, and snatched us from solitude and despair. Our awakening was rather bewildering, for a railway station lighted up with gas carried us suddenly into the heart of European civilisation of the most commonplace kind, and, as I looked out, half-asleep, I almost wonder I did not ask where was the omnibus for the Palais-Royal. It was a good way off, for it was at Ancient Gyzeh that we had arrived half-asleep. Instead of an omnibus, we were to find a boat to take us across the Nile just above Roudah. Then began a steeple-chase among the passengers, to secure the best places on board the little steamer which was puffing away at a few hundred feet from the station. We were received by a cavalcade of asses on the

over our car, escorted by their drivers we started for the hotel. We stopped half-asleep, and if our names had not been on the ground-floor, we certainly should have been found snoring upon the table next morning.

Our arrival was doing well, and we commenced our customary cavalcades immediately. At dawn we were in the superb alley of Chourah, where we rode for an immense distance under a vaulted roof of verdure. The sycamores and acacias which bound the road at each side, and whose gnarled branches are thickly interlaced, are of extraordinary size. On the right, the magnificent vegetation is interrupted by some splendid dwellings surrounded by tufted trees; on the left lies the Nile, almost parallel with the road. After an hour and a half of this delicious ride, we came to the gate of a beautiful villa, which had an attraction for us equally novel and great. There we found a perfect studio, with easels, canvas, everything which a painter requires. A studio on the borders of the Nile! It was the realization of my fondest dream, and all the palaces of the pachas were worthless to me in comparison with that wide window whose green curtains permitted us to get 'effects' as if we had been on the sixth floor of the Rue Notre

Dame des Champs. We were most warmly welcomed, and we could have forgotten all Egypt there completely, had we not had the Nile and the Pyramids inevitably before our eyes.

The disk of the moon was at its thinnest, so that, on this evening, our cavalcade met with some ignominious tumbles from ass-back, among the little ponds and holes which lay between us and Cairo on our return thither. We were very fresh and smart at starting, but we looked like brigands when we came back, and were obliged to resort to many tricks in order to escape being devoured by the watch-dogs, while we were getting our own door opened.

The dogs of Cairo deserve honourable mention, not for the elegance of their form, but on account of the important and serious part which they play in the city in general, and in each street in particular. Sometimes black, but generally tawny, they are more like wolves and jackals than dogs. They are the real guards of the city, at the hour when all honest people are asleep, and nobody is abroad but malefactors, among whom they include Europeans who cannot break themselves of the habit of dining out, going to balls, and coming home late.

In order that one may return alive from these

various operations, it is prudent to go out on ass-back, armed with a strong cudgel, and perhaps a revolver. It is also indispensable to keep the middle of the road, because if you rub against the shops confided to the charge of these huge dogs you would find yourself engaged in a very losing game, and sure to be severely bitten. The story of Jezebel being devoured by dogs, which I had hitherto regarded as a poetical exaggeration, I now look upon as simply true. One can quite easily realise it when one looks at these ferocious animals, who devour each other when there are no old women to fall out of window.

There exists among them a sort of canine confederation, which assigns to each his street and his dwelling ; should a dog be found out of bounds, all those belonging to the street in which he is an intruder, fall upon him and tear him to pieces. The corporation has its statutes and a regular syndicate. For the maintenance of the canine police, the butcher of each street has the cure of souls and stomachs ; all his remnants are due to the dogs of his quarter, and the hour of the daily distribution beholds the queerest groups. Necessitous families are in the front rows, and the mothers know how to protect their rights at

the national canteen, with their teeth. Rats, cats, and stolen fowls compose the food of this important class of the population. At the cost of a halfpenny cake judiciously distributed, you may secure the friendship, and if necessary, the protection of thirty of these four-footed janizaries. At Cairo, the dogs are national property, and you may adopt them at discretion, from the litters which encumber the public places. In concert with the birds of prey, the dogs of Cairo, like the dogs all over the East, act as public scavengers. Without these omnivora, the city would certainly be unhealthy, and their natural gluttony is the only obstacle to the installation of cholera in these narrow streets, which without them would simply become uninhabitable.

We carefully revisited everything which we had seen during our first stay at Cairo. The bazaars were our first destination, and owing to the fortunate situation of our hotel, we had them close at hand.

At the end of the Mouski, a wide and entirely covered way divides in two the quarter in which the bazaars seem to have been grouped. On turning to the left one reaches the goldsmith's bazaar, on the right one finds the bazaar of stuffs, carpets, shoes, and costumes of all kinds ; further on, keeping to the

side of the citadel is the bazaar of harness, saddles, and all travelling equipments. The bazaar called 'of arms,' is an absurdity, since the hotel Drouot has seized upon all the real Oriental weapons. At Cairo we saw nothing but horrible modern blades, from Brussels or from England, shining with trumpery newness. To say that there do not exist any beautiful and ancient arms would be an exaggeration, but they are rare. Some dragomans and sheiks of the desert have shown us ornamental arms of great rarity and beauty, which they regarded as family relics, and which they would not have sold at any price, they said, meaning that they would demand a good deal of money for them. The goldsmiths' bazaar is the most peculiar. It is not on the level of the rest of the street, and to reach it one has to go down several steps, and get wedged into the crowd which blocks up the narrow door. It is rather an immense caravanserai than a bazaar. Each of the goldsmiths sits in his little booth, strongly barricaded like a beast in a show, with his mysterious little coffers, his scales, his pipe and his spectacles. Out of this wonderful lair we issued, bearing a store of necklaces and bracelets, for presents on our return home. These necklaces, and bracelets are very pretty and appropriate to the

nature and the costumes of the country. But to be worn with true effect, those massive rings and thick necklaces which are so becoming to the bare necks and arms of the fellah women, should be worn in conjunction with the rest of their attire—that is to say with as little clothing as possible.

The surplusage value accorded to European money in the East, and especially to that of France, gives rise to a very simple method of payment. The shop-keeper puts your purchase into one scale, and your gold into the other, such is his mode of establishing the equilibrium between his merchandise, and your Napoleons. The design of these ornaments is almost uniform, so that the workmanship does not count.

One of us had the good fortune to come upon a pair of antique bracelets, finely carved, and incrustured with beautiful turquoises. They deserved the success which they achieved in France, where they were received with open arms. From the goldsmith's bazaar we went to the emporium of stuffs and clothes, &c. where long gowns and short jackets for men were heaped and hung about in the most complete disorder. There I also left some small change, but this was a profitable investment, because I intended to do fine things in painting from these odd garments.

Abayes and long gowns with tight-fitting sleeves, are the two garments most generally worn in Egypt and in Syria. The *Abayes* are winter mantles, the Arab's last resource against cold. The garment is composed of a great piece of square stuff, and is perfectly simple in form ; it is merely the Hebrew tunic, a bag with square openings for the head and the arms and the legs. But luxury, which takes possession of everything, has contrived to turn this classic garment into an object of art, by the nature of its tissue, and the incomparable embroidery with which it is laden. The abaye of the camel-driver has no ornament but two brown stripes throughout all its length. In countries farther from Cairo, the abaye is made in other shades. In the neighbourhood of Petra, the large stripes are blue, and the garment is sometimes lined with furs, but in the desert, the primitive colour of this stuff is generally simplified by wear, and uniform uncleanliness. Abayes in green silk embroidered with silver, produce a dazzling effect. They may indeed be found to suit all tastes, from black with gold embroidery to the lightest shades. In this bazaar is to be found an assortment of all the most brilliant kouffies. I found one with a gold-coloured ground,

which has since appeared, with applause, at many fancy balls in Europe.

The vests, the tunics, and the gowns never undergo any change of form ; but the stuffs, with their silken flashes are infinitely various, and make the costumes look new. These silky and lustrous materials, half wool half cotton, are spoiled by water, unless they are wet they look like fine silk. The sleeves which have a tight and awkward effect, from their funnel shape, serve to preserve the skin from the painful force of the sun. The whole costume, whose amplitude is so surprising to strangers, and seems intended to procure as much inconvenience as possible, is, on the contrary, consistently in accordance with hygienic laws, in a country where the enemy to be dreaded is torrid heat. The silk stuffs in which the Arabs wrap up their heads, far from stifling them, keep them deliciously cool ; the more an Arab is covered up with *loose* woollen garments, the less the sun can get at him.

Let us go on to the Gobelins. Several of our party had a great weakness for the charming carpets, which are made in Persia, and sold in great numbers at Cairo. While I was bargaining with the clothes-sellers, these gentlemen were making purchases on a

colossal scale in an immense court at the side, which is called the Carpet Court. In addition to the marvellous beauty and profusion of its contents, this court is interesting in itself, for its interior is one of the most picturesque in Cairo.

The booths of the sellers, the presses, the coffer are real masterpieces of sculpture. Verandahs of carved wood shelter the shops from the full glare of the sunlight; and this half light, skilfully managed, brings out in greater perfection the brilliant shades of the carpets which were heaped up before our eyes. We had the advantage of being new arrivals, and we availed ourselves of it. It was an orgy of purchasing. No doubt they thought we were buyers on commission, and indeed I do not think anything could have stopped us, except the expense of the carriage of all these beautiful things. We bargained most eagerly for carpets with white ground. All our packages were despatched to France, of course without escort, and the result to me individually was that on my arrival I found my share turned out into the yard, my studio being too small for their accommodation, for which hospitality my landlord made me pay a smart sum.

In order to rest our eyes after this dazzling experi-

ence, we went to see the Nilometer, at the extremity of the islet of Roudah.

The importance to all Egypt of the rise of the Nile, and the immense consequences which result from its greater or less elevation, lend a national, almost official interest to this little structure. It is the barometer of the public fortune, of the wealth of the country.

Mékya (measure), is the Arab name for the Nilometer, which is composed of a square-shaped well, into which visitors descend by a staircase. In the middle of the well there stands a graduated column. Eighteen cubits indicate the minimum level of the river, at twenty-two Egypt takes a general bath, which would become a disastrous overflow if that figure were exceeded.

From thence we went to Boulah, to see the antique wonders of M. Mariette's museum, and could not sufficiently admire the treasures amassed there, the gold and jewels, necklaces, bracelets, enamels, amulets of all kinds, and household and agricultural utensils. The most distant epoch of the Pharaohs was revived before our eyes, in these thousand details of familiar life which time has thus capriciously spared. A colour-box, palette, and basket of eggs admirably preserved,

especially caught our attention. To archaeologists, the most interesting portion of the collection consists of a number of small figures in enamelled clay, in wood, in basalt, and in lapis lazuli, which are carefully classified and labelled. In the centre of the museum stands the statue of Phtha, the most ancient object of art which has ever been discovered. The hieroglyphs make this masterpiece cotemporary with Abraham.

I envied the fixed eyes of this monolithic Pharaoh, which may have seen the holy Patriarch, the fair Sarah and Lot. Next day Edmond About asked me to accompany him to visit the mosques. He had his pockets full of *firman*s and gold coins, and we promised ourselves that we would make our way into the most impenetrable recesses of these strange places of worship.

The mosques Hassan, El Hekem, and El Azhar were the three most interesting of those which we carefully inspected on that day. There are more than four hundred in Cairo, and a whole book would not suffice completely to describe those which are specially deserving of study, so that I must confine myself to the three I have named. All the others indeed resemble them in interior arrangements, and to a certain extent in historic interest.

According to its individual importance, a mosque may be compared to a cathedral, or simply a church. The 'minaret is the steeple whence the *muezzin* summons the faithful to prayer, by a monotonous chant of certain verses from the Koran. The always elegant cupola corresponds with the position of the tomb of the caliph, sultan, or rich personage by whom the edifice was built.

There is very little variety in the interior arrangement, which almost invariably consists of a square court with its peristyle, in the centre the fountain of Ablution, in the sanctuary, properly called *mihrab*, a sort of niche turned towards Mecca, is the *member* or pulpit, generally richly carved and decorated.

The mosque of the Mameluke sultan Hassan, dominates the whole city, and it is, beyond contradiction, in colossal size and pure taste, the most beautiful of all Eastern mosques. Neither Saint Sophia, nor the massive structures of Constantinople are to be compared with it.

It stands in front of the citadel, on the Roumelieh ; a gate which reaches the full height of the whole building gives access to it. Under this principal entrance are highly ornamental marbles of every colour, united by bronze roses and other ornaments. It terminates

in a kind of niche, crossed near its utmost height by bars of carved wood which sustain a collection of glass lamps and ostrich eggs, richly coloured. The visitor goes up a few steps, and then, having come down a few others, finds himself in an immense passage furnished on both sides with stone benches. This is the ante-chamber of the mosque, and at its upper end a strong guard is stationed. This gloomy prelude serves to increase the effect of the marvellous spectacle which strikes the eyes all at once, when the visitor comes out of the gallery into a great court, in the shape of the Greek cross, and occupied in the centre by a Saracenic construction of extraordinary picturesqueness. This beautiful octagon pavilion, supported on porphyry columns, and surmounted by a brilliantly decorated cupola, is merely a canopy for the piscina. Facing the great door is a colossal ogive forming a single vault, which is repeated on the other three sides of the court ; this is the sanctuary, which is raised one step above the remainder of the building. At the end, long chains of thousands of lamps seem to hang down from the sky. The *mihrab*, always turned towards Mecca, is richly ornamented with precious enamels, paintings, and arabesques. The pulpit is a gem of sculpture ; and on all sides of it

stand brilliant-coloured trophies ; green, red, and yellow banners, which have been brought from Mecca. Two square platforms on each side, not so high as the menber, serve as stalls for the ulemas and the young dervishes, for whom these places are exclusively reserved. The remainder of the marble pavement is covered with mats and rich carpets, which keep the feet of the faithful from the cold.

The preponderating colours in the ornamentation of the mosques are green and red, which alternate pleasantly in arabesques or designs of all sorts. The religious inscriptions are generally painted in blue or gold characters on immense boards, with a green ground.

When this superb mosque was new, I do not think it can have had the mystic and poetic character which it now possesses, and, although I do not like dirt, I believe time alone could have so marvellously blended those bright colours, which must originally have been glaring. On the right of the *mihrab*, a little low door which is hidden by a black curtain embroidered in gold, gives access to the immense chamber which corresponds to the cupola. Here is the tomb of the sultan Hassan. A railing of gilded iron and an inner barrier of painted wood shut off

the square stone from the remainder of the great hall, which is in a state of complete nudity and neglect. The height of the vault is quite terrific, and its angles are garnished by enormous stalactites which make the cupola look like a succession of owl nests. Every day some portion of the wooden decorations and sculptures detach themselves and fall noisily down. Far from remedying this dangerous state of things, the Arabs regard being sent direct to paradise as a celestial favour.

The sheik, who had his doubts of our religious fanaticism, and of our longing to behold the prophet, begged us not to linger in this place, where we were exposed to these sacred accidents. The predominant impression made by visiting the mosques, is of the exclusively religious and almost poetical character of these monuments. They are equally unlike our decked-out cathedrals, and our mock-Greek temples which are like theatres at prayer-time. When I saw the grave and silent Arabs prostrate themselves, quite unaffectedly, before the wall of the mihrab, I could not refrain from thinking of my parish church, the Madeleine, where the 'one o'clock mass' on Sundays is so like a first representation, that there are people who stay away from the Longchamps races to go

there and see the costumes. At Cairo, it is fanaticism if you will, but it is religious faith, not fashion and frivolity.

Equality before God is scrupulously preserved. The dirtiest ass-driver invokes Allah kneeling upon the same carpet as the most richly-dressed sheik. To laugh, to spit, or to blow one's nose in a mosque would be attended by most unpleasant consequences to the perpetrator, and Heaven knows we do not restrain ourselves in those respects at home. I went several times to hear the Koran read, and I never saw anyone asleep. Saint Paul cannot boast of any such success in Paris.

The mosque of El Hakem, which we visited afterwards, is unfortunately a ruin, but the remains are sufficiently grand to enable us to estimate its original importance. It is situated at the northern extremity of Cairo, to the left of Bab-el Nasr. Judging by the appearance of the ruins, we came to the conclusion that the action of time had been accelerated, and some of the materials of the mosque borrowed for the fortifications which adjoin the Gate of Victory.

This mosque, though completely abandoned as a place of worship, is still remarkable and admirable as an architectural monument. Two enormous square

towers support the remains of two minarets with finely wrought flutings, which resemble the Hindoo edifices whose remains I had seen on the banks of the Euphrates. It is the most ancient of all the mosques in Cairo. An inscription over the gate assigns it to the year 393 of the Hegira. It retains traces of great interior richness, and yet, it is nothing now but a relay place for the numerous caravans which come from Asia by the way of Suez and Sinai.

The mosque El Azhar is interesting because of its two-fold purpose. It is a house of prayer, and a place of public instruction. Every Mussulman sect, every country, every race of the great Arab family, is represented there, and has a special class. Not only for Egypt, but for the whole East, this University has been instituted, organised, restored, and aggrandised by several sultans in succession.' Each group of students has its wooden compartment, its presses, and its professor's chair. A nazir does duty as inspector in each 'quarter,' and superintends the discipline of this market-place of education. The curly-haired Abyssinians occupy trellised compartments, which strikingly resemble cages, and the strange physiognomy of the students completes the likeness to the Jardin des Plantes. Although this mosque

was surnamed the Magnificent by the Arabs, it does not deserve the appellation at present, for the 'restorations,' are ridiculous, chiefly consisting of great blue stripes and glaring ornaments. Only the marvellous sculpture of its double outer gate now keeps up its ancient renown.

The mosque El Azhar is also a kind of charitable asylum for all the lame and blind beggars who abound at Cairo ; and in the same place are cultivated flowers of rhetoric, and the most repulsive infirmities. The number of blind persons thus succoured is considerable. They are maintained by the Government, and their blindness increases their fanaticism against strangers, and dogs of Christians who succeed in getting into the mosque. The sheik advised us to be alert in keeping clear of them.

Having concluded our study of social economy from the life, we felt inclined to rest awhile at the house of some one who would be likely to offer us divans and coffee, so we begged to be conducted to the Persian Embassy, that we might pay our respects to the ambassador, and afford him an opportunity of entertaining us. The majestic and official character of a visit in the East, never fails to strike me as comic. You go to see some one whom you do not know, and

in your character as a stranger, you are gorged with liqueurs and bonbons, inundated with coffee, and overwhelmed with thanks for the honour conferred by your visit. On our way to the embassy, we indulged in visions of fantastic divans, heaped with softest cushions ; but we had reckoned without the progress of European civilisation. The ambassador made us sit on horrible mahogany chairs, under the impression that this delicate attention must meet our most ardent wishes. These articles of common hall furniture were in singular contrast with the truly Oriental splendour of the sumptuous dwelling—the basins of porphyry, the columns of marble, the pictures framed in gold and tortoiseshell : all the innumerable treasures of an Eastern palace. But the mahogany chairs were not the only samples of a fantastic mingling of the commonest European articles with the richest products of Oriental art. Coloured lithographs and photographs of the cheapest kind, in yellow wooden frames, and many other articles familiar to the cheap-Jack's cart, were among these incongruities. In spite of the inconvenience of our chairs, we were delighted with the princely welcome which was extended to us. After the customary compliments had been exchanged, the ambassador presented us to his sons, distinguished-

looking youths, dressed by Dusuatoiy, and with nothing Persian about them, except the point of their black cloth caps. The interpreter explained to us how highly they had been educated, and very injudiciously concealed from us until the close of our visit that they could speak French admirably. Fortunately, we had not interchanged any of the remarks which were suggested to us by some of the details of this strange interior.

We were taken regularly through all the apartments, the gardens, and the stables, which were all most wonderful. Here, for the first time, I beheld the Asiatic luxury with which the Persians love to surround themselves, but which is almost always spoilt by some tasteless toy, or some ridiculous accessory of our most prosaic customs. The bath-room of Persian porcelain, and the painted wood-work of the ceilings were special objects of our admiration, and we went away with our pockets crammed with sweetmeats, for we could not have refused anything which was offered to us, without infringing the strictest laws of Oriental politeness.

We had taken leave of our host, and were retiring, when we came against a black and brilliant colossus, bejewelled from head to foot, in fact caparisoned like a

Spanish male. This chief guardian of the harem of the ambassador was a splendid type of those monstrous beings whom we had already seen at Cairo. He was all legs and arms, dressed in gaudy robes, and covered with clinking chains, armlets, and bangles. A sword longer than himself trailed at the end of a silken scarf, and made him look absurdly like Blue Beard in a pantomime.

Women only have the privilege of visiting harems, which have been described by many writers with the most unlicensed exaggeration and untruth. The harem is, in reality, rather a luxury than a social institution, and vanity is more concerned in its maintenance than profligacy. The harem is the barometer of the fortune of a great personage. His resources are estimated according to the number of women in his household, and the number of horses in his stables.

Hitherto we have had only incomplete and hasty accounts of the life of the harems, supplied by the ladies authorised to visit their inmates. The sister of Mr. Lane, the celebrated 'Egyptologist,' has written a clever *résumé* of all that has been related on this subject. In her 'Englishwoman in Egypt,' we find highly interesting details of these mysterious dwellings, of the sumptuous *fêtes*, of the magnificent

jewels, of the splendour which surpasses our imagination. A privileged traveller told us that she had seen in a harem several signet-holders set with diamonds, which represented at least 50,000 francs each. The seclusion of the women in the harems has been much exaggerated, however; though men are not permitted to cross the threshold, the inmates are free to go out to the baths, and to visit their female friends. I have met numbers of them, many times, mounted on their richly caparisoned asses, riding about the streets, preceded only by a saïs, or a slave.

The women whom one never sees in the East are evidently the most beautiful; those whom one does see are more strange-looking than beautiful, and those whom one regrets to have seen, allow themselves to be admired with much facility. There is so little variety in the names of women, that there is no difficulty in procuring a glimpse of the fair inhabitants in almost any quarter of the city.

Only cry out Fatma! Fatma! as you pass through a street, and fifteen or twenty Fatmas will look out through chinks in the lattices, just as the cuckoos look out of the little trap-doors in the Swiss clocks. Among them, there will be one or two worthy of the trouble of this simple trick. It was a

Fatma whom we persuaded to come and sit to us. It was a novel experience for her, and she came accompanied by her richest ornaments. She was tall and handsome, with a fine expressive head of the pure Egyptian type, and her sole defects were that she drank araki like a camel-driver, and smoked like a factory chimney. But one cannot have everything all at once. Greediness and the most comical childishness are characteristic of these primitive, almost savage creatures, who are brought up like learned birds, or dancing dogs, to dance, sing, drink, smoke, and sleep well. Fatma did not in the least mind trampling on the law of the Prophet, which especially interdicts photography, and every other reproduction of the human face and form. She came to us for two days in succession, and found herself so comfortable in our quarters, that we had some difficulty in making her understand that we had business of imperative importance elsewhere. She carried off bakshishs sufficiently varied and valuable to secure us her lasting and grateful remembrance, and came in for the whole remaining stock of the sixpenny neckties which we had not expended in Fayoum, and for which we felt certain the austere monks of Sinai would not care.

A great religious ceremony occurred during our sojourn at Cairo, which forms one of the most interesting reminiscences of our journey. It was the departure of the carpet (Kisweh) for Mecca. This carpet is an offering made annually by the Viceroy to the Mosque in the holy city of the Prophet; and the royal gift is despatched in the most imposing manner, with all sorts of religious and official state. From the preceding evening, the whole town is in a ferment. Everybody is rushing about;—the curious to secure places whence to see the sight,—the pilgrims to reach the rendezvous of the caravan. The procession is formed near the Gate of Victory. The richly caparisoned travelling dromedaries and the baggage camels are objects of admiration to the entire population. The fanatic crowd press round the animals to caress them, and seem to think themselves sanctified by the contact. The religious character of the festival renders it necessary for Europeans to observe the strictest caution and decorum. We were on ass-back, and for the first time we paid a compliment to the Prophet by wearing the ordinary tarbouche, that ridiculous red cap first introduced into Europe by Pashas in disgrace, and travelling photographers.

We had stationed ourselves in the great square in front of the citadel, which was an admirable position, but not to be attained without difficulty. We were joined by an immense crowd proceeding in the same direction, and our asses had much to do to keep their feet amid the human inundation. The women, arrayed in their handsomest blue robes, their nails freshly painted, and all their jewels hanging about them, were the most busy and determined in the midst of the tumult. On such occasions they express their religious enthusiasm by a sound called the *zagrhonta*, a kind of clucking which they produce by the tongue. At the corner of each street the detachments coming up to join the main throng of pilgrims are joined by enthusiastic bands of volunteer escorts, and *cawas*, armed with *courbaches*, force the crowd to open its ranks for the passage of these confraternities. Woe to the asses, the children, and the dogs who do not get out of the way with sufficient alacrity! Behind these come musicians carrying their instruments. Then the ulemas, dervishes, and other functionaries of the mosque of each quarter—all these forming the escort for the pilgrims, until they join the great caravan. We were stopped at every ten steps by these processions, and by the ever-growing waves of the

multitude, but we did at length succeed in reaching the Roumelleh, where the most extraordinary spectacle we had ever beheld awaited us.

Before us was the citadel, with its picturesque gate richly draped ; on our right, the vista of the Mokattam, and of the first mosques of the caliphs ; behind us the mosque Hassan, which threw its gigantic shadow over the whole square. What a picture was about to unroll itself before our eyes, set in what a magnificent framework !

There was a long delay, of course, as there always is in complicated festivals ; but we had done well to go early, because of the crowd. A line of soldiers was drawn up across the square, keeping the road clear for the procession, and in order to protect it against the fanatical demonstrations of the people.

At length, the guns of the citadel announced that the *cortège* had started, and the whole city, perched upon its terraces, aided the sound by piercing cries of joy. Men lifted their arms towards heaven ; others prostrated themselves in the dust ; women uttered shrill screams of satisfaction ; camels and asses added their gutturals to the concert. The uproar was quite indescribable. Then began the defiling of the Court carriages. They were preceded by detachments of

infantry, cavalry, and artillery, and the vehicles, magnificently adorned with feathers and gilding, formed a superb prelude to the real *cortège*, while the guns, fired at intervals, emphasised the official and almost dramatic side of this strange ceremony.

On a sudden the cries were redoubled, and heads turned with feverish impatience towards the side of the bazaar which connects the great square of Karamaidan with that of the citadel. The terraces, the minarets, the ruinous walls seemed as if they must crumble under the weight of the multitude heaped upon them, and the noise was maintained at its height by the shrill prolonged howls of the women. Our ears were bursting and singing, our asses were fretting and fidgeting, and our dragoman signed to us to hide our pipes, for the carpet was coming!

Two men, completely naked, and performing the strangest gambols, preceded the *cortège*; these two madmen are held to be saints, venerable and religious personages who have embraced this career because no other is sufficiently holy for their taste. They are maintained by the piety of the faithful. Splendid horsemen, numerous *cawas*, seconded by soldiers of the regular army, kept back, with the utmost difficulty, the crowd of fanatics who rushed

forward to throw themselves under the feet of the white dromedary, the bearer of the precious gift of the pilgrims. This magnificent animal, completely covered with golden brocade, advanced slowly and painfully under the weight of the enormous catafalque which swung from side to side upon his back. This catafalque, arranged in tent form, was surmounted by a sparkling jewelled crescent, and hung round with little bells; the whole of the canopy glittered with gold embroidery and precious stones, beneath which the material, which was green silk, had utterly disappeared. Over the top of the dome of the ambulatory tent, and of the four small pavilions, floated black horse-tails surmounted by finely wrought crescents. The dromedary's head was laden with ostrich plumes, tied up with silken rosettes and wonderful embroideries. The other portions of his adornment matched the general colour of the catafalque, which, being entirely green and gold, produced a dazzling effect in the distance.

Then came the musicians, mounted on beautiful dromedaries. These men, who were half-naked, were performing some truly deafening music at some distance from the carpet. Their dromedaries were painted with henna, and draped in brilliant-

coloured stuffs. The roll of the drums was rendered inaudible by the terrific noise made by these wretches perched in an aerial orchestra, whose zeal was worthy of a better cause. Some of them, picked out, no doubt, were singularly and hideously deformed, and the cheeks of all of them were so distended by the use of their portentous musical instruments, that they really seemed to form a part of their grotesque trumpets and flutes. Huge drums hung from the humps of their camels, shrill fifes mustered strong, and refused to yield to the efforts of the trumpets and cymbals, which rent the air, and nearly made our ears bleed. But the proficiency of these performers is measured, it appears, by the noise which they make. The dromedary bearing the carpet made a long pause in the square, during which the musicians, without releasing their cheeks from distension for a moment, ranged themselves on each side, and made more noise than ever. This halt enabled us to examine all the details of the strange and superb spectacle, as the rest of the procession now came on to the centre of the square. A huge *santon*, entirely naked, opened the march. The dromedary upon which he swung himself about was painted in henna, and also covered with brilliant trappings. The crowd, mad

with enthusiasm, had broken the line of soldiers which kept the road for the caravan ; men, women, children, old people struggled together for room to kiss the feet, the hands, the knees of the filthy monster, who sat on his golden saddle covered with grease and dirt. He was hitched up so high above them that the greater number of the faithful could only get at his sacred feet. The *santon*, yielding little sympathy to the veneration of the crowd, twisted himself about like a dog troubled with fleas, and occasionally, when the pious caresses of the people aggravated him too much, he kicked out furiously among them. The *santon* went on swinging himself to and fro, in time to the music, as if the dromedary had not been standing still. Was this because he wanted to get away, or from impatience to return to Mecca ? No one could tell by his puffed and oily face, over which his hair, long, unkempt, fell in hideous, filthy masses. The women made themselves especially conspicuous by the boldness with which they broke through the line of guards, and scaled the side of the camel to reach the ugly wretch. It appears that the most beneficent and wonderful properties attach to contact with this mass of melting grease. The women touched him with their clothes, their

jewels, even their children, who were thereby to be preserved from every kind of misfortune, and endowed with perfect health. Those among the crowd who were too short or too weak to reach the toes of the holy man, clung frantically to the dromedary, and assuaged their pious transports by kissing and handling him. I conclude that the unhappy beast did not understand the motive of these demonstrations, and that he suffered terror under the impression that he was about to be devoured.

The spectacle of so much human folly, consecrated and rendered for ever incurable by an idolatrous and barbarous religion, was as sad as it was curious.

After we had witnessed all the repulsive details of this religious orgy, the rest of the caravan defiled before us, in rich equipments ; for there is great rivalry in luxury among the pilgrims, and they pride themselves on new inventions for the display of their wealth. Some of the number were hidden in cages of gold wire, each covered by a tent, and these ambulatory dwellings were decorated with extraordinary richness. Gorgeous stuffs, emblematic banners in brilliant colours, and fluttering ends of gold and silver tissue, were quite common adornments. In some instances, the tents, though simply covered

with canvas, were remarkable for the accessories which the needs of a long journey were supposed to render indispensable ; drinking jars, narghilehs, lances and other arms, bucklers, sacks of provisions, were suspended like trophies along the flanks of the camels, who seemed to estimate their own importance in proportion to the burthens on their backs. After the procession of the rich, which lasted more than two hours, came that of the poor pilgrims, who, trusting in the protection of the Prophet, were about to make the long and painful journey on foot. They were not the youngest of the caravan ; more than one very old man was in the ranks, who, we thought, must surely die on the way, or in the Holy City. At least they could not hope ever to return. We noticed many among these unfortunate creatures who wore the green turban, the distinctive mark of all the faithful who have already made the pilgrimage to the *kaaba* of the Prophet.

Several *santons* figured in the long line, all naked, and all horribly and variously ugly. It appears that the profession of travelling *santon* descends from father to son. One of them was, we observed, the object of special ovations, and our dragoman explained that he had made the journey to Mecca seven times,

always in the same state of nudity. We might have divined the extra sanctity of this human lump of grease, by the intolerable stench which he exhaled. But we were Christian dogs, and unfit to judge. Our ass-driver asked our permission to go and venerate this monster, and, more nimble than a serpent, he got through the crowd, slipped between the legs of a soldier, and we saw him clinging to the calf of the holy personage, which he rapturously embraced.

Everything passes—even a caravan. The *fête* came to an end, and we came back literally bewildered by these strange sights, astonished by the splendour of the decorations and accessories, but profoundly saddened by the actors, who played their parts in this apotheosis of besotted folly too well. Such a mixture of gold, jewels, and ignorance made us long for the purification of a bath, which is indeed, under any circumstances, the most exquisite of Oriental pleasures.

It requires a good deal of time to take an Arab bath seriously, for the operation is in five distinct acts, as exactly performed as a piece of music.

First act. We enter mysteriously through a little door into a vast hall of white marble, in which coolness is maintained by several small fountains, which play

into marble basins. Along the walls are shelves of carved wood, heaped with carpets, cushions, and mattresses; and you may help yourself to a dozen cushions if you like. When you are entirely undressed, you hand over all your jewellery and small articles of property to an old gentleman who stands at the door, and who returns them to you as you leave the bath. Then you flop yourself down on the ground ten times in succession, and nobody laughs, but a grave Arab in drawers lifts you up, surveying your bruises, and puts on your feet wooden sandals, which are especially intended to prevent the falls you have just had. He is joined by another, who guides and sustains your faltering steps. Bruised by your falls, and stumbling about in your Japanese slippers, you hold on by the slippery arms of your guides, who are going to make you shine all over like a jewel; without troubling themselves to enquire whether you have asked for a bath, 'with' or 'without friction.'

Second act. On coming out of an apartment which, relatively to your simple costume, is rather cool, you are made to go through a long dark passage and several little doors, and you are brought into a great white marble hall, with tubes from which fall jets of water of various degrees of heat, which

fill several painted piscinæ. The temperature is increased by gratings to admit hot air, which comes up from the ground, and if you put your foot upon the gratings it is nearly roasted. Here you sit down for a moment, and you think the ceremony is about to begin ; but not at all : this is the dumb scene, and you feel as if you were the Sleeping Beauty in the wood ; for the two Arabs who have brought you thither, go to sleep without asking your leave. You do not know how long this interlude is going to last, and you endeavour to make them understand that you have not come there in such a costume to amuse yourself. They are as deaf as the Pyramids. They take no more notice of your entreaties than of your threats ; they have their instructions. After the lapse of ten minutes, which, as you have not your watch, seem like two hours—at the end of this mysterious interval, which is, though you do not know it, a hygienic preparation, your Arabs sign to you to follow them. They lend you their aid to resume your stumbling motion, and they bring you to a third hall.

This is the third act ; and the first impression it makes upon the spectator is very strange. Squatting before the little fountains with two jets, and each provided with a formidable bunch of dried herbs, two

Arabs exactly like your own escort are apparently occupied in tearing to pieces some dead bodies, who lie upon their backs or their stomachs, in inert indifference.

After you have been thoroughly saturated with the vapour of this hall, in which the temperature is twice as high as in the preceding one, the Arab spreads you daintily out upon the marble flags, holding your neck so that you cannot stir, and the operation commences. At first the shampooer uses only his fingers, which travel over your whole body with extraordinary dexterity and minuteness, and this skilful manipulation, which severs every particle of dust from the skin, is varied by frequent ablutions of water, hot, cold, and tepid; to which succeeds the second stage. The shampooer turns you over, all of a piece, first on one side, then on the other. His nervous, supple fingers do their duty well. You are scratched, pinched, cleansed, rinsed, until it is a wonder you are not transparent. You are then rubbed with a kind of effervescent soap, until the surface is highly polished; your head, eyes, and nose are included in this ceremony, from which you come out as red as a lobster. The men rub you almost to death, and if you actually did die under their hands, they would polish

you with soap all the same. It is impossible to give an idea of the state of exhaustion to which one is reduced by this second operation ; after which one is left for dead upon the flags, until profuse perspiration sets in. After about five minutes, one is inundated with boiling water, unless one prefers bathing in a piscina, in which eggs might be boiled. Then two fresh Arabs come and fetch you away, after having dried, rubbed, and wrapped you up carefully in soft towels.

Second station in the temperate zone. If you have neglected to put on your little wooden sandals, you execute fresh gambols upon the flags ; but one rarely does forget after the first bruising, which survives the polishing. You are then packed up in another dozen of towels, and your Arab takes you up bodily in his arms, and carries you to a bed, where you enjoy, in perfect rest, all the benefit of this complicated bath. The cool temperature of the hall, the gardens into which deep trellised bays open, the beautifully decorated ceilings, the plashing fountains, and the flowers which surround you, produce an impression of animal beatitude complete beyond description.

The real fatigue of the preceding operations, and the immense satisfaction which you experience on

lying down, contribute to the wonderful sense of ease which pervades you from head to foot.

You sleep or you do not sleep ; at all events you dream, while finely-dressed Arabs bring you an indefinite number of cups of coffee, ices, and liqueurs.

I took these baths frequently, and sometimes I brought my colour-box, and worked there. This was real bliss.

We must not linger over these debilitating recollections, but bid them, and indeed all Egypt, *au revoir*. Let us think of Sinai, Moses, and the manna of the Hebrews ; for we are going to expiate all these worldly pleasures in the privation, sand, and fasting which await us in the desert, where we shall be reduced to one glass of water *per diem* for all purposes to which water is applicable.

Before starting from Cairo, we provided ourselves with a formidable supply of good wine, which enabled us to endure the drought of the desert, and gained us the esteem of the worst classes of the population.

This done, we bade adieu to wonderful, beautiful Cairo, where we would fain have remained for six months, so well did we know that we left behind much that is interesting to the student and the painter. The day of our departure was sad, by general consent. Each

of us went his own way, and I selected for my farewell pilgrimage the Gate of Victory and the Tombs of the Caliphs. To them I owed my first and fairest impressions of travel ; of them I took a grateful leave, as the sun sank behind the Pyramids.

PART II.



SKETCH XI.

SINAI, ON DROMEDARIES.

Suez—A Little Piece of Canal Work—Our Official Dromedaries and their Suite—The Red Sea—Ain Mousa, the Wells of Moses—Our Entry into the Desert.

It was unanimously resolved that we were all to be very serious. We were fully alive to the gravity of this, our second expedition, involving real dromedaries and real desert, and not the smallest restaurant; so that it behoved us to assume quite a different demeanour, a necessity which some of our number regarded with apprehension. As for me, I began to study the Bible, and to practise Hebrew manners and gestures.

The city of Suez was not calculated to disturb our new-fledged gravity, but yet it did not justify the

severity of our good resolutions. We crossed the sands in a railway train, to this dirty little town, which sorely needed the cutting of the isthmus, to give it a little picturesqueness and animation.

Our tents were not to arrive until the following day, with our superb dromedaries, so that we had no resource but to go to the *Hôtel Anglais*, which is a dépôt for all the travellers for Indo-China and Japan. Unfortunately our arrival coincided with a departure, and the hotel was full. Our dragoman succeeded, after much parley and persistence, in procuring us 'shakedowns' in the principal sitting room. When we went to take possession of our beds, we found them already occupied by twelve Englishmen, who made room for us with a very bad grace.

The desert which divides Cairo from Suez is very extraordinary in appearance, in consequence of the wonderful mobility of the sands which compose it. This white, impalpable dust undergoes the strangest transformations, as it follows the caprices of the wind. Now it is heaped up into mountains, anon into swelling domes, and the next day the same sand will lie spread out in a flat, monotonous, immense plain. The journey across it is very difficult to travellers, and even to the dromedaries themselves,

who can only progress very slowly, as they constantly sink in the sand up to their knees.

Now the first stage out of Egypt is simplified by the railroad, but if commerce, and travellers who are in a hurry, have gained by the change, the real lovers of the East have lost one of the most interesting points of the desert. The sands, extraordinarily white, are strangely affected by the variations in colouring which take place in the sky, during the different sections of the day.

In the morning they are pink, with violet shades ; in the afternoon, the full light of the sun restores their brilliant whiteness, softened by tones grey and golden, most exquisitely lovely. In the evening, during the brief twilight, these sands reflect the burning beams of the sun at his setting, like metallic plates ; then they are no longer mountains of snow, but mountains of fire. How deeply we regretted that we could not study these different aspects, wedged as we were into a carriage for six persons, while our number was eight. The sand, perpetually in motion, is displaced with startling rapidity. The least stir of the wind produces the effect of the thawing of snow upon the crests of these moving mountains ; the sand tumbles down upon itself, and is a gulf and a crater

in one. How many caravans has it not swallowed, and is it not still destined to swallow! Suez, at the period of our visit, was in a disgustingly dirty condition, and it does not possess any historical monument which might induce one to disregard this unpleasant fault. The simple house in which Buonaparte lived is the only excuse in the place for a pilgrimage. We felt impatient to get away, but we would not leave the town without visiting the gigantic works which connect the extremity of the canal with the landing place of Suez. The little pasteboard models which I had seen at the Universal Exhibition in 1867 had certainly not prepared me for the great impression which this marvellous enterprise produced upon me. The canal, which connects the two seas, is unquestionably one of the finest results which human intelligence aided by science has ever obtained. The huge dredges, which fling out on either side with their giant arms the sand which they perpetually dig, are quite monumental. We visited one which was undergoing repair, and the dimensions of these machines, the results which they obtain, gave me an idea of the obstacles which had to be overcome, and of the energy and perseverance which were necessary that

one man might commence, prosecute, and lead to its successful conclusion so colossal an enterprise.

A copious breakfast on board the steamer *L'Impératrice* terminated our proceedings on that most interesting morning, and then we left railways, and engineering feats, for the land of Moses and Aaron.

The tide was high, and we crossed the Red Sea by the aid of a charming little boat belonging to the Company, at the point where Pharaoh's army was submerged. Our caravan had made the grand tour, and arrived that morning, and we gladly made acquaintance with our superb dromedaries. These noble creatures had been graciously placed at Gérôme's disposal by the Viceroy, and we soon learned to appreciate their value. To them we owed the rapidity of our journey, and the facility of removing from each of our encampments. In the presence of these magnificent animals and their keepers, our first sentiment was timidity at the novelty and grandeur of our position.

As I was the youngest of the party, the tallest of our official dromedaries was selected for me. I looked at him, and, recommending my soul to its Maker, began to climb up his side. He had been made to kneel for this purpose, and he rose the

moment I was in the saddle with such zealous alacrity that he swung me about in a truly frightful fashion, on account of the unequal length of his hind and fore legs. I kept my countenance. Was I not much above all my companions? Certainly; but I was none the happier for this purely local superiority.

The uneasiness experienced by the rider of a dromedary has been greatly exaggerated, and the sickness said to be so often endured is the result of resisting the natural motion of the animal, which is not, properly speaking, jolting, but quite a regular and bearable swinging movement. We got into the habit of this kind of locomotion surprisingly readily, and our rapid proficiency excited the warmest admiration on the part of our escort.

Our first stage was not long. Without leaving the fine sands we were to reach *Aïn-Mousa*, or the Wells of Moses.

We entered the desert by sand-hills of extreme fineness and whiteness, and left behind us the little city of Suez, of which we soon lost sight. It is flanked by the *Djebel Attaka*, a reddish mountain which commands the landing-place, and is lost in the infinite on the south side of the sea, which reflects its tints. The absolute absence of drinkable water at

Suez lends great importance to the five fountains which exist in this place. The nature of the soil, and the presence of these waters, are favourable to vegetation ; indeed, the springs are shaded by graceful palm-trees. Two persons have dwellings there, and have laid out little gardens. Here we passed our first night in the desert ; and the idea had its charm.

Our baggage camels and dromedaries were fastened up with ropes, just like horses in our country, and formed a most interesting portion of our camp. The distribution of their daily food and the management of them interested us deeply, considering that we were about to live for two months on their backs.

Before we once more climb up the sides of these friendly hunchbacks, let me rectify a singular error which prevails, respecting the dromedary. This animal is not a distinct race from the camel ; on the contrary, he is absolutely identical. The only distinction is that the one is a beast of burthen, and the other is trained and used exclusively for riding purposes. There exists no other difference between the camel and the dromedary, than the difference between a cab horse and a racer.

And now let us go forward into the desert, which stretches out in its seeming infinity before us.

SKETCH XII.

THE WADIS.

IN all sincerity I must acknowledge that our first experiences in dromedary-riding were not unattended by painful results. It was only on the day after our first stage to the Wells of Moses, that we realised the state of exhaustion we were in. But habit is quick of coming, and we soon got used to the exertion. Our camp, during our sojourn in the desert, consisted of three large and two small tents. Of the former, one served as a common sleeping room for some of us. The second was our dining and drawing room, and the third contained, not without difficulty, all our cooking apparatus. The two small tents formed apartments reserved for the serious members of our party—individuals who were not in the habit of singing and dancing round tables half the night, and from one of them floated our admiral's flag, while we were navigating the sands. The dwellers in these privileged places applied

themselves generally to avoiding too close proximity to the noisy and undisciplined crew of the others, but when the experiences of the desert became too monotonous, momentary fusions took place; the serious persons solicited permission to come into our gay precincts, to which we never consented without making them pay their footing.

To any spectator perched on the mountain heights, our caravan must have presented a very respectable appearance, for our effective force consisted of twenty-seven dromedaries and camels. Our nine riding dromedaries belonged to the stud of the Viceroy; four camels were told off for water transport; three carried the tents and all their fittings; seven were laden with chopped straw and beans for themselves and their brethren—for, though a camel, having laid in a store of water, can go for a week without drinking, he must have one meal a day regularly, however moderate its quantity may be. One of these interesting animals might well have been astonished at the interest we took in him; he was as well entitled to hold up his head as the famous ass who carried the relics, for more than Cæsar and his fortunes had been committed to his capacious back. This privileged creature carried our photographic apparatus, and all its bottles and

glasses. What care we took of him when he was going down-hill, and through difficult passages ! What mistaken ideas he must have entertained respecting the origin of his importance ! How many statesmen are there who impute to themselves all the merit of the glass they carry ! Don't let the globe fall ! That is the foundation of the enthusiasm which they inspire.

In these desert countries the affections fix themselves with intensity upon the simplest necessities, which one has never previously believed to have any importance. Next to the camel who was laden with our photographic treasures, we cared for one on whose hump our *pot au feu* cooked itself, all day in a marvellous Swedish stewpan. Aladdin's lamp would have been valueless to us in comparison.

This admirable invention of Swedish genius deserves a detailed description. It was simply a wooden case strongly lined with woollen stuff, and hermetically closed, containing a simple stewpan, which fitted it as a jewel fits its box. In this simple stewpan you put all the ingredients of the *pot au feu*, with the proper quantity of boiling water (which can always be ready before the start) ; then the box being carefully shut, the ebullition will be kept up indefinitely ; indeed it

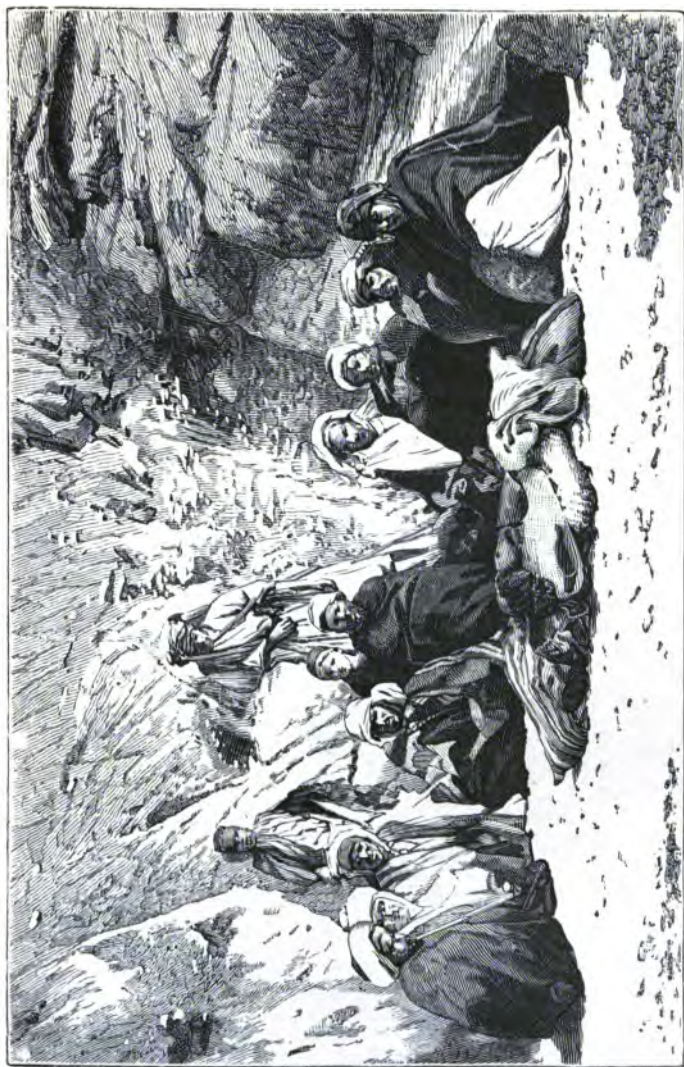
would last, were such an experiment necessary, until the water should be entirely evaporated. In a carriage, on horse, ass, or camel back, the *pot au feu* cooks itself, and when, having begun your journey in the morning, you arrive at your destination worn out with fatigue and hunger, you find a hot and delicious soup ready for you.

The Arabs were so astonished at this simple physical phenomenon, that they believed it was the result of sorcery on our part, and the marvellous stewpan caused them as much terror as admiration. Every time the camel-drivers passed before the pot-bearing camel, they gave him a wide berth, and crossed themselves after their fashion. Our cook only—a great amateur of his art—had conquered his religious scruples, and he declared that he would renounce the Mahometan paradise, if it did not include a Swedish stewpan. Let me sketch a few of our people. Our dragoman, a Syrian, was very intelligent, but, like all Arabs, endowed with assurance beyond belief. The labours of Hercules were child's play in comparison with the feats of his performance, which he would narrate, and illustrate by the most wonderful gestures. 'When you come to France,' we told him, 'we shall present you to Lord Longbow, and he will imme-

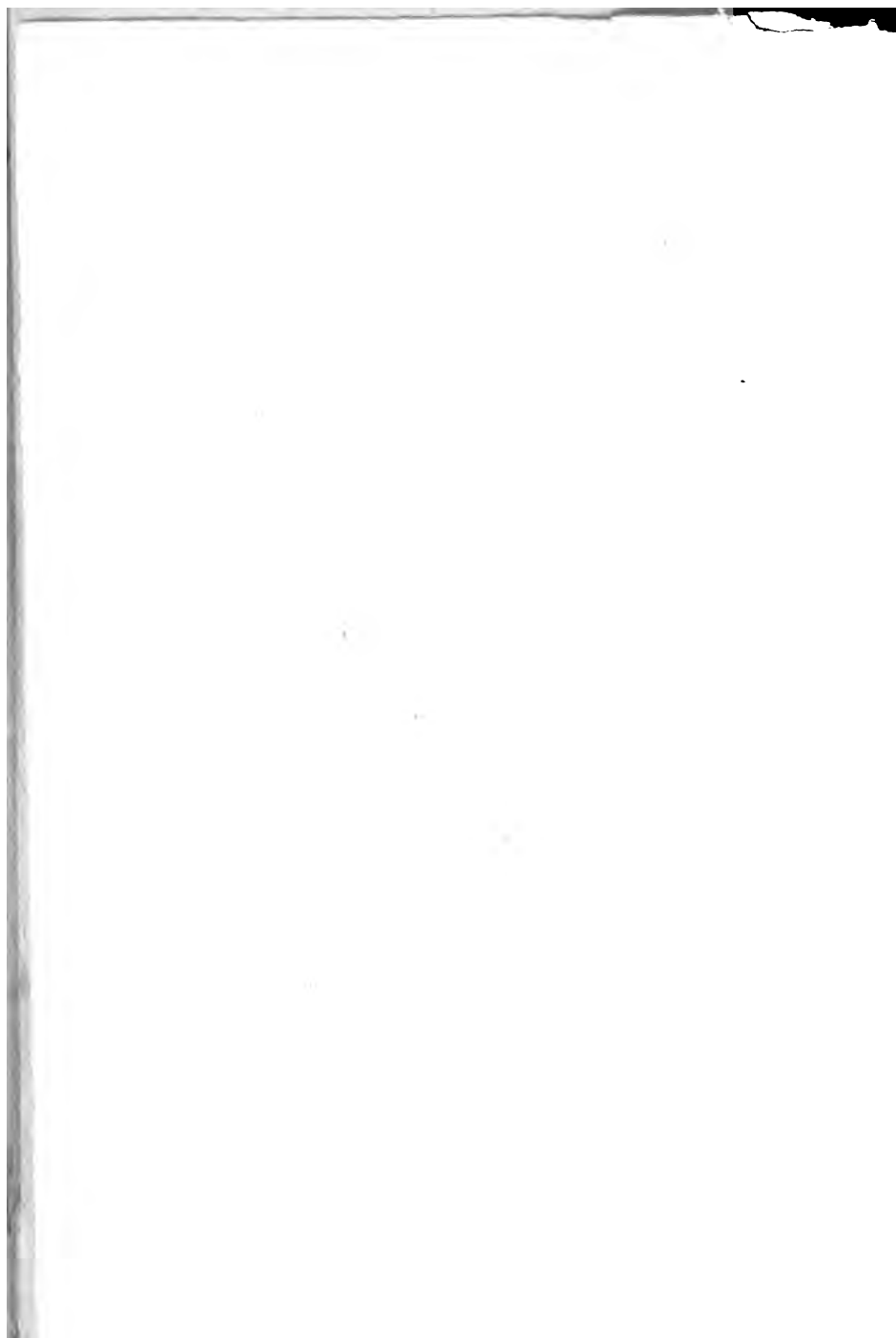
diately take you for his dragoman.' He quite believed us, and awaits the event with impatience.

Our other two servants were Egyptians, much more silent and respectful than the dragoman. They were very gentle and intelligent, and they told us they were preparing themselves to be hereafter leaders of caravans. One of them, a native of Upper Egypt, was named Ibrahim ; his face was thin and beardless, his gestures were graceful, and, together with his long blue gown, gave him the look of a timid girl. We called him Miss Ibrahim. He and his fellow-servant Michael were exemplarily clean, a virtue of extreme rarity among Arabs, and which made the dirty habits of our dragoman and his acolytes all the more conspicuous. Another type among our servants was our cook's assistant, a little African negro, whose name we never knew, and who was of course called Snowball.

He was always laughing, and his dazzling white teeth shone like gas jets at the entrance of a cavern. His unwearying, unvarying gaiety contrasted with the dramatic side of his functions ; for he was the great sacrificer : he it was who killed the doomed sheep and fowls, but he also was charged with the feeding of them. The fowls were very fond of him ; they



OUR ESCORT.



followed him about everywhere. On the march, when Snowball approached the camels, on whose sides hung the cages of the fowls, there was general rejoicing—cries, crowings, cluckings, to which he responded by opening still more widely his never shut mouth. The hour of slaughter was the same as that of feeding, so that the fowls hustled each other out of the way to get to him. It was extremely comic to behold this functionary with a kitchen knife in one hand, and a bag of corn in the other, distributing life and death at his capricious will to the creatures who loved him. There is a picture to be made out of the scene, and Sophocles would have turned it into a tragedy. *Taib*, *taib*, *ketir*, were the only words which we ever heard issue from Snowball's huge grinning mouth, ornamented with two great thick lips which had never met each other, but each of which formed a raised pathway from one ear to the other. Achmet, our cook, was tall and thin, dumb as the Sphinx, and having, like him, lost his nose. His chief characteristic was a charming one—he was an excellent cook.

And now, as you know all about us, forward!

At first the Desert was frightfully arid and dreary; not an atom of vegetation brightened up the tawny

and grey shades of the sands through which we plodded in the direction of the mountains.

In its general configuration, the Sinaitic peninsula forms a singular agglomeration of mountainous chains, running almost parallel one with the other, and which meet in a kind of cluster at the extremity of the peninsula. Between each of these gigantic walls, placed in such strange juxtaposition by nature, are the natural beds of the torrents that originate in the rains or in the melting of snow. These narrow valleys, which are just like corridors, are called by the Arabs *wadis*. The word 'valley' does not accurately reproduce the sense of the Arab word, considering the narrowness of the passage which the traveller has to thread for a space of sometimes several kilometres. The light, striking only the horizontal planes presented by the fretted sides of the two mountains, gives these ravines the same partially dark effect as that of a cellar which depends on a long slit for daylight. The power of sound is extraordinary in these *wadis*; the strange multiplied echoes enabled us to make, with very little effort, noise enough for an entire population. For two days, while labouring through sand and pebbles, we kept these magnificent mountain chains in sight; but they seemed to retreat before us as if

they were in a mirage, and our joy was great indeed when we entered the first of the series of corridors. *Wadi Beiyanah* was the first into which we plunged. It was noon; the tent-shade was arranged, and we went to breakfast, enjoying the satisfaction of believing ourselves lost to all the rest of mankind, when a chattering of human voices roused us from our illusion. Our baggage camels and our camp were not to join us until much later, and we were quite at a loss to what to attribute these unexpected sounds. At length, at the furthest end of the *wadi* in which we had seated ourselves, three umbrellas became visible. Under the shade of the three parasols were three Englishmen, and one Englishwoman who had a fine complexion. As they passed us we exchanged the customary European salutation, and we saw that they were certain islanders who had been determined to catch us up since Suez, but who had not calculated on the speed of our coursers; so that we had twice left them far behind. We had supposed the road to be so easy to find, that we had loosed our poor little dog. But the road was soon to change. The *wadi*, hitherto very narrow, suddenly assumed a totally novel appearance. The way in which the two peaks of the mountains flung themselves upwards on

either side, but at right angles, like two walls ; the regular counterforts which support them, contributed to complete the illusion which led us to take these oddities of nature for the work of men's hands.

At the end of this immense gallery, we came on sandy soil, in which little bushes with pearl grey leaves grew sparingly, and looked like lumps of wool blown about by the wind. Our dromedaries were well pleased to browse on these bits of accidental verdure ; each appropriated a clump to his individual use. A little further on the vegetation assumed grander proportions, and then we made impromptu riding-whips of the twigs, with which we accelerated the pace of our coursers. Here and there we could trace the passage of nomadic tribes, or of the desert lightning by the calcined trunks of palm trees. We were pursuing our way through this strange district, when one of our party caught sight of one of the umbrellas which had passed us so gallantly on the preceding day. 'I am lost,' said the Englishman who carried it, and who had strayed from his caravan. 'Follow us, then,' said I ; and he followed us, always keeping well under the shelter of his red umbrella, until we came up with his dragoman, to whom we delivered him over.

We were about to leave these narrow gorges for a while, and continue our journey to, and along the borders of the Red Sea.

At this place, the mountains began to assume those red, green, and black tints which defy the most skilful eye to detect their cause. The earth and the rocks can only have undergone such strange decompositions and overturnings under the action of fire; and the red flanks of these natural walls are cut from top to bottom by veins of deep orange and yellow, which run on into imitations of every sort of variegated marble. This spectacle is more curious than interesting, and we were rendered the more indifferent to it by our delight at finding ourselves on the edge of the sea, and by the prospect of a long looked-for bath.

In fact we had hardly emerged from Wadi Sahr, when our dromedaries broke into their most rapid pace, and rushed into the water up to their girths. It was amusing to see the men and the beasts floundering about together. At this point the sea is perfectly transparent, and indeed throughout its whole length this Red Sea, so redoubtable in history, is as clear as crystal. Mahomet himself might have been content with our ablutions, for we stayed in the water until

nightfall, and we would willingly have pitched our tents there. Exquisite shells of every form and colour under our feet, were the only inconvenience. The tender feet of our dromedaries suffered a good deal in consequence. I made a collection of several exceedingly beautiful shells, but I afterwards dropped them almost all by the wayside, in order to lighten the load of my unfortunate dromedary.

We had prepared our beds in our tents before we abandoned ourselves to the luxury of our bath, intending to enjoy to the utmost a reparative *siesta* afterwards, but we were only just entering on this stage of the operation when the weather changed quite suddenly. The keenest cold succeeded to the burning winds which had prevailed all day, a storm of thunder and lightning burst over our heads, and we had to see at once to the safety of our tents. We staved off the tempest as well as we could, and were beginning to feel secure, when a fearful blast of wind arose, and literally carried away the second sleeping tent with its ordinary accessories. I was lucky, for my part, to escape with a fright only, for I was actually underneath the tent at the moment when it was carried away. It gave us no little trouble to catch it; for, like an enormous parachute, it rose into the air, and

sped away in the direction of the *wadi*, so that we looked like lodgers running frantically after their house.

The hurricane lasted all night, and made our departure on the following day a difficult matter. Some of our camp furniture had been lost in the confusion of the previous evening, and the saturated soil had become very slippery and dangerous for our camels and dromedaries.

It was proposed and carried unanimously that we should halt for one entire day ; so that we enjoyed a second bath, and some of us had an opportunity of making studies of the strange-looking mountains. Our tents, laid out along the edge of the sea, were drying in the sun, before our departure, when two Arabs announced to us that two human beings were visible on the horizon, whereupon two of the party went to meet them, and brought them to our camp.

They were two skeleton figures, with staring eyes, nearly naked, and they made signs to us that they were dying of hunger. The poor fellows were two fishermen, whose boat had been wrecked by the tempest several days before. During two days they had lived on raw fish, but for four days they had had nothing to eat, and their appearance was quite dreadful. Our

chief and the doctor vied with each other in their care of the miserable creatures. They gave them food, which by degrees restored them, and then, as we were about to start, and they had to return to Suez, we gave to each man three loaves, one bottle of wine and two of brandy, which was all we could safely spare from our stores, and barely sufficient for their long journey. Nothing could exceed the gratitude of these men whom we had thus saved from the terrible and certain death of hunger. I shall never forget how they wept on taking leave of us.

We parted ; they to go one way, and we the other. The sea was splendid, and our route lay over the fine sands, sparkling with splendid shells. The mountains rose in a series of grand and gigantic walls on our left. The natural layers of stone of these wonderful hills seemed to be sculptured, and their base, furrowed by the rains, resembled a huge staircase, whose regular steps produced an extraordinary effect. It was as though we were perpetually climbing the steps of Indian temples, which multiplied themselves before us by magic. In this labyrinth of ascending and descending steps, we had the misfortune to lose Nina, our little dog. One of the dromedaries put his foot on her back, and the shock so terrified her that

she ran away, and all the efforts of our camel-drivers to recover her proved vain. In the sterile solitude, and at the distance we were from Suez, no other fate was possible for the poor animal but to die of hunger, or be eaten by a prowling jackal. The loss of her was a universal grief to the caravan, and effectually spoilt our enjoyment of the superb spectacle unfolding itself before our eyes. As we advanced, the mountains became higher, and their colours became more brilliant than those which we had remarked on the preceding days.

We had now left the sea-coast, and re-entered the heart of those terrific gorges whose existence only the practised eyes of the Arabs can discern, so close do the sides of the mountains stand together. Our first experience of the salt-water springs was gained at Wadi-el-Amârah. They are very numerous in this mountainous country. Those in Wadi-el-Amârah are believed to be the bitter fountain of Mara, mentioned in the journey of the Hebrews. Lepsius does not concur in this opinion, but the water is none the less undrinkable for that. Our dromedaries and camels, deceived by its limpidity, plunged their heads in it, but swiftly withdrew them, uttering grunts of disgust and disappointment. The water tastes like

that of the Dead Sea ; and though the mineral principles it contains may be different, it has a similar flavour of lucifer matches. We only dipped our hands and faces in the spring, but the corrosive action of the water covered our skin with blisters and patches of salt, which we found it very hard to get rid of.

At Wadi-Schilla, the colouring of the mountains exceeded everything we had fancied, in wildness and strange effect ; they looked as if they had been symmetrically painted in vermilion red, or yellow ochre ; on their red flanks arabesque patterns, which defy description, were traced in various geological layers, white, blue, and violet in colour.

One of my friends accompanied me in ascending the reddest mountain, in order that we might see whether the colouring was real, or those extravagant tints the result of an optical delusion. But we found it was all quite real, and from the top to the bottom every stone of these sharp rocks glowed like burning coal. I brought away some pieces, which have been much admired by learned geologists. We remained for several days in this fantastic spot, where not a blade of grass is to be seen, and felt like flies on icebergs. One circumstance caused us much alarm. Two

of our party discovered the first insects with which we had hitherto been called upon to do battle, and with which one always has to war in the East unvictoriously, because they are not to be defeated or routed in the end. The intrusion of these unwelcome guests considerably damped our joy. The unlucky two who had inaugurated these insects became objects of general distrust, and we even discussed the propriety of checking the evil in the bud, by poisoning them. Many plots for this purpose were formed. Ultimately we preferred to go to their assistance and partake of their sufferings. A day later we were all in the same plight, and might have exchanged prisoners.

I had foreseen this danger, and in a provident spirit had purchased at Suez one of those little ivory hands with an elastic handle, which are common objects in the châteaux in the south of France. I had been very much laughed at, but when the horrid little wretches swarmed about us, every one was enviously eager to get hold of my hand. If I had put it up to auction I should have made my fortune; but I preferred letting it out to subscribers, six hours at a time. The subscriptions were paid in pickles, of which I am extravagantly fond. Bank-notes and coin had temporarily lost their value, in the desert.

We were about to cross the wonderful Wadi-Mokatteb, or Valley of Writing. At a height of 200 yards, the sides of the mountains, as polished as tables of marble expressly prepared for the purpose, are covered with Sinaitic inscriptions, and this extraordinary open book is spread open over a length of more than three kilometres.

The origin of these hieroglyphs has been hotly and variously contested. The red brick hue of the mountains which bear these inscriptions lends a still more striking character to this strange page of history written on the face of nature.

The valley opened on a vast circular plain, surrounded by mountains on every side. The camp was enlivened by a visit from the brother of our sheik. He was not alone, for he entered the *salon* in company with a huge sheep, which he had come to offer us, provided we would pay him handsomely for it. This politeness on his part cost us twenty-five francs, an unheard-of price in that part of the world. But we could not refuse, under pain of annoying this gentleman and others, who might have made themselves disagreeable. He was very gracious, and invited us to dine with him, and to visit his little family, his little tents, and his little sheep. He told

us how pretty they all were, with graceful gestures and almost feminine intonations. We allowed ourselves to be tempted ; put on our gloves, and prepared to go out to dinner. We could not catch anything that we had not already caught, so we were fearless ; nevertheless we admired our own courage. The singular repast which awaited us repaid the trouble ; pilau, couscossou, and koumiss crowned the board, and a sheep had been got ready, in Arab fashion. The entire sheep, placed upon the fire like a chestnut, had been taken off completely calcined outside, and perfectly raw within. It had been previously stuffed with fruits and odoriferous herbs, which made it smell like an apothecary's shop. We had to pronounce it all excellent ; and though Heaven helped us, by sending us the aid of all the dogs of the tribe to assist in devouring the meat, we were very ill for several days. When we had gotten over our dinner party, we once more left the plateau to enter narrow gorges, where the soil and the mountain sides were of a white and powdery earth, that gradually overpowered the red shades from which we had not yet emerged. Here the ground was more even, and the crevasses fewer and of less depth.

The path was exceedingly difficult, strewn as it was

with polished blocks of granite, which occasioned our poor beasts more than one fall. They had had as little experience as ourselves of this painful climbing. We had alighted, and holding them by the bridle we clung to them under pretence of helping them. After this narrow defile, we found ourselves all of a sudden at the entrance of a magnificent valley, which lost itself in the steep sides of the loftiest mountain which we had yet seen. The sharp stones which strewed this road destroyed all its charm for us, and severely cut the feet of our poor dromedaries. Nevertheless we had before us one of the finest points of view in the whole desert. Mount Serbal rose high above all the surrounding mountains; the valley, bending by degrees, sank down towards the sea above Thor, and the rapid fall of the ground, ploughed up with rents, and rounded rocks, sufficiently indicated the violence of the waters at the epoch when this valley was a furious torrent.

We had re-entered the mountain road by a crevasse, and were resigning ourselves in advance to a new series of *wadis*, when the nature of the ground changed suddenly.

Arable land announced itself by shrubs and tufts like those which had already charmed our eyes by

their silvery foliage and elegant forms; then the shrubs gave way to trees, and palms pushed their proud tufted heads through apertures in the rocks. This oasis is the only fertile *wadi* in the peninsula of Sinai. As we got further into it, we found a veritable forest of superb palm trees, with a delicious stream running through it. The village, composed of earthen huts, was hidden by these wild palms, whose branches, having been allowed to grow from the entire trunk of the tree, swept the ground.

We were much struck by the novel aspect of the primitive palm tree; it completed the wild character of this strange locality. The little low houses were sometimes below the level of the beaten track, for in this gorge the keenest cold succeeds to the suffocating heat which we were then experiencing. The less vivid colouring of the mountains rendered the background of this magnificent picture more natural. We had never seen anything so picturesque. We all wanted to set to work on 'studies' without an hour's delay; and a halt of several days was voted unanimously, a halt which we occupied in conscientious and delightful hard work.

One morning curiosity induced me to undertake a perilous ascent. One of my friends and I had climbed

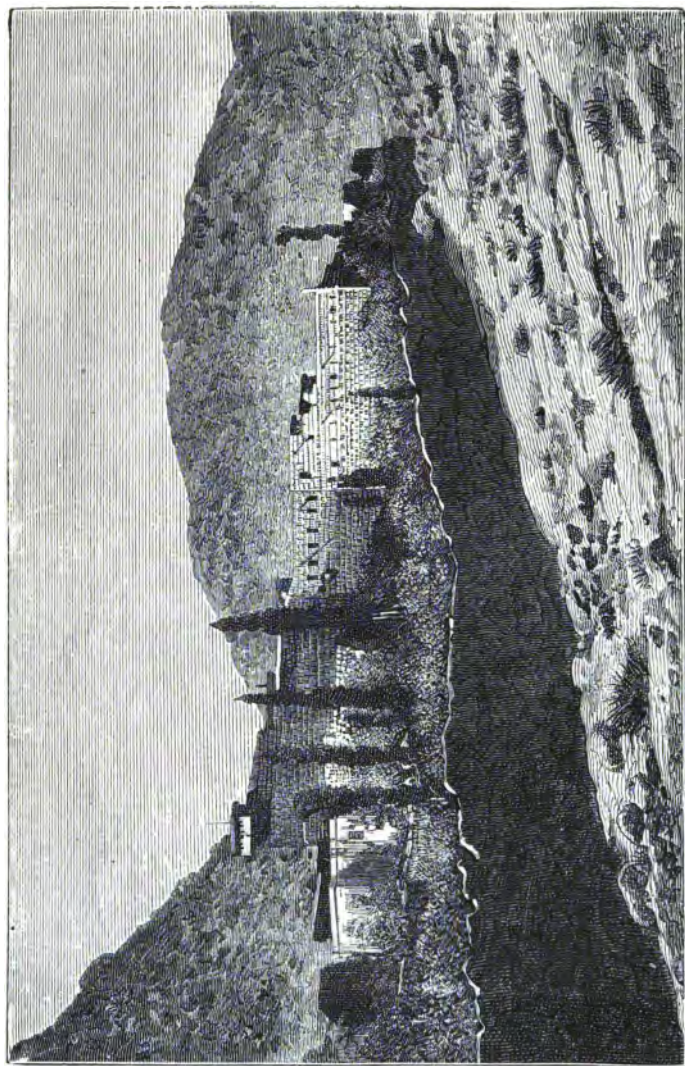
haphazard, always up and onward ; for we wanted to see what was on the other side of the wall. But this wall was a mountain of the first class, which amused itself at our expense by letting us go on climbing. We had neither foreseen nor calculated the descent, and I returned almost in pieces from this performance. From the height which we had reached, the camp, in the bottom of the valley, had the effect of three white spots in a green field, and we could hardly distinguish the forms of the objects. On the other hand, owing to a singular acoustic effect, we heard, quite distinctly, the conversations which were taking place in the tents. Our expedition was under discussion, and its imprudence was condemned in the most unqualified terms. We shouted as loudly as we could in reply, but our voices were lost in the clouds. The amazement of our companions when, on our return, we repeated word for word all the pretty things they had said about us, was most comical.

Every day we bathed in the limpid waters of the stream. One fine morning we were paddling about like ducks, when a caravan turned into the *wadi*. It was that of an English lady, accompanied by her son and his tutor. We promptly hid ourselves in hollows of the rocks when we caught sight of the new-comers ;

but in the evening the two caravans exchanged visits. The English lady gave us delicious tea, but we could not entertain her by any means so handsomely, so that we were obliged to resort to our photographs with special eagerness. The lady, who was travelling rapidly, was to set out the next day for Sinai. She had just a month in which to 'do' Syria and Asia Minor, and get back to London *via* St. Petersburg. After a satisfactory sojourn at Wadi-Faran, and after we had visited the few Egyptian ruins which are still to be seen, we made but one stage of the distance between us and Sinai. Wadi-Solaf, or the Gorge of the Wind, was the last station we had to reach, but it was hard work. We had to dismount, and our dromedaries suffered much in the downward climb, through the rents in the mountains. On issuing from the *wadi*, the spectacle which awaited us recompensed us for the difficulties of the road. In front of us, Mount Sinai itself rose into space, and its imposing profile stood out against the background formed by the mountains which surrounded it. Djebel Catharine, which is reached first, amazed us by its colossal size. This mountain is held by *savants* of a new school to be the real Sinai of the Holy Scriptures. On the right, at an extraordinary

elevation, we observed some white buildings, the remains of the palace which Abbas Pacha took it into his head to rear in so inaccessible a region. At last, after many ups and downs, we crossed a field of some yellow herb which resembled cane in its flexibility and strength. Our beasts would have devoured it eagerly, but we were in haste to conclude this stage of our journey, and we had to restrain them by vigorous application of the *courbache*. On turning the foot of Djebel Catharine, we found ourselves in the valley which extends to the foot of Horeb, and Sinai. The convent, perched on the escarped side of the holy mountain, looked like a small fortress, and the gardens rejoiced our eyes with their novel gaiety, in this arid land of terrible memories.

We pitched our camp in sight of the convent, and, after we had hastily arranged our dress, we set off to visit its hospitable inmates.



GENERAL VIEW OF THE CONVENT OF SINAI.



SKETCH XIII.

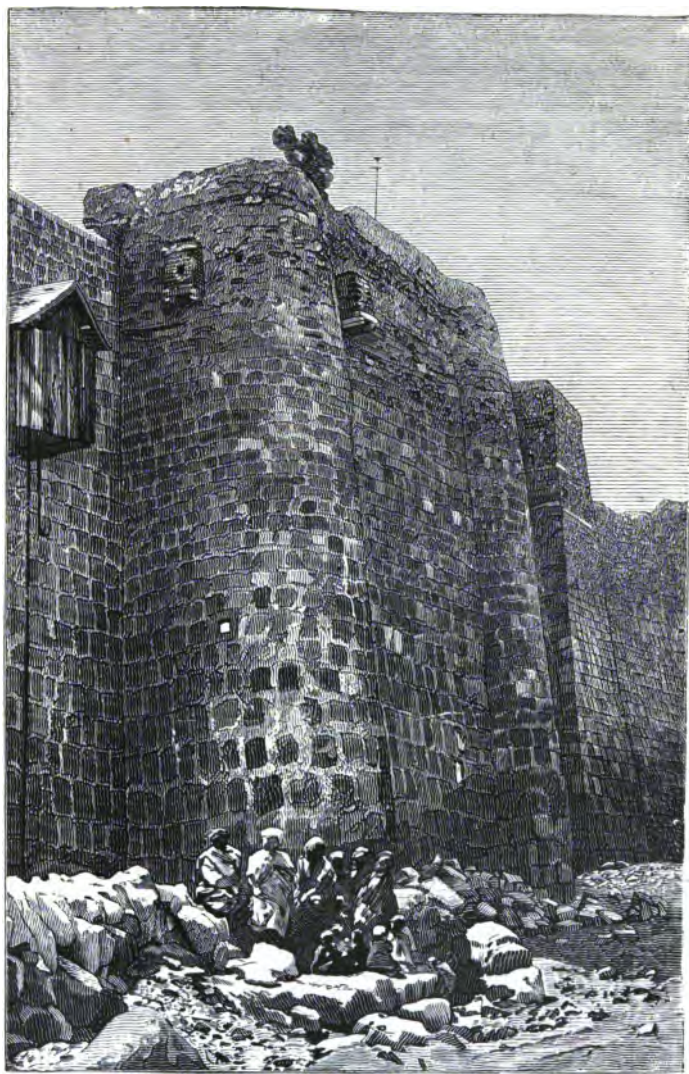
SINAI.

The Convent and the Dwellers therein—The Ascent of the Holy Mountain—Abstinence and Privations—A Treasure of Precious Stones—Mount Horeb.

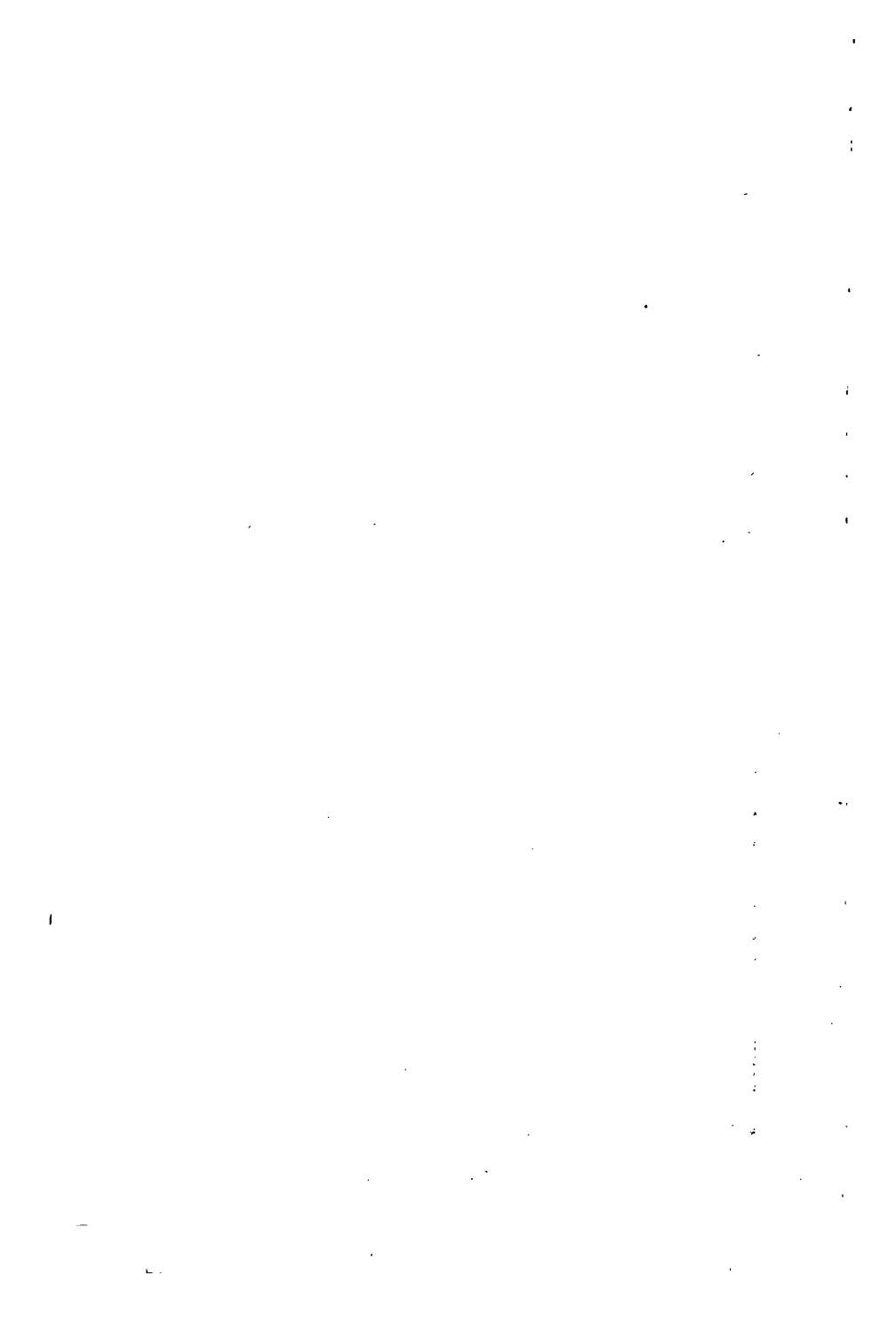
THE convent of Mount Sinai is the strangest imaginable assemblage of buildings. Every style may be traced in it; from Byzantine architecture to the most modern epochs of Arab art. Colossal outer walls, flanked by towers and counterforts, give the convent the aspect of a great fortress, quadrangular in form, though conforming to the bend of the mountain against which it is reared, as though it had attempted to scale Mount Sinai, and remained suspended in space like the eyrie of an eagle. It is a little city, an immense strong castle which could sustain more than one attack, more than one siege, on the part of the Arab tribes who covet its treasures. Such is the effect produced by these mediæval

buildings, where long lives pass by in silence, and whose inmates never come forth from them, except to make war. Judging by the height of the towers and their counterforts, they must be very rarely scaled, and for some time we could not guess the position of the drawbridge or entrance of this impregnable fortress.

At length we found it out. It is a kind of flap-floor of basket-work worked by a pulley, by means of which the monks communicate with the outer world. The aperture, masked by a wooden shutter, is level with the extreme height of the wall, and excludes every supposition of surprise. The rope which serves to hoist up packages and travellers is worked by a capstan, to which the monks harness themselves to lift their wood, which is brought to them by the Arabs in exchange for certain alms. On a fixed day, a distribution of bread and rice is made to all the poor of the neighbouring tribes. We were present at this curious ceremony, when bread literally fell down to them from heaven, out of the high-perched tower. We had hoped to make an aerial trip, and enter the convent by this singular aperture, but we arrived too late. The modern mania for embellishment has reached even to Sinai, and the



ENTRANCE OF THE CONVENT OF SINAI.



monks have allowed themselves a real door in the newest and worst taste. This new entry, which was 'inaugurated' by us, was not so much to our fancy as the basket, a privileged mode of entrance now reserved for sacks of rice and flour, and forbidden to us, even in our capacity of artists, by the rules of the convent. This was our first mortification, but we speedily forgot it in the novelty and interest of our visit.

We began at the beginning, by paying our respects to the superior. He was in the library, and we were received by a reverend father with a fine, but sickly face, who conducted us to the reception room. In order to reach this apartment, we had to ascend several inclined planes, to mount steep staircases, to pass through dark and winding passages, and to reach a second series of constructions, which, being on another level, seem like a second little town built on the top of the first. A vast courtyard, ornamented by three superb cypresses, formed the centre of this second layer of habitations. Out of this court we went, turning in various directions until we came to a wooden stair, which we climbed, and which was no better than a worm-eaten and slippery ladder. At the end we found ourselves on the principal

balcony opening on to the interior courtyard. Our polite guide then led us through a little door into a low-roofed room with two windows, one opening on the yard, the other on the garden. While we waited for the superior, whom our guide went to fetch, we carefully inspected the furniture of this strange room, in which religious emblems, crucifixes, portraits of the popes, sacred pictures, Greek inscriptions, and the oddest conceivable *ex votos* were mixed up with piles of boots, zouave pipes, tobacco bags, and match-boxes adorned with portraits of actresses belonging to the boulevard theatres, of Hortense, Schneider, and Thérèse. The superior appeared, the presentation took place, and we were welcomed with the most gracious gestures. Our dragoman did all the talking; we had merely to smile acquiescence, and thus had leisure to observe our entertainers closely.

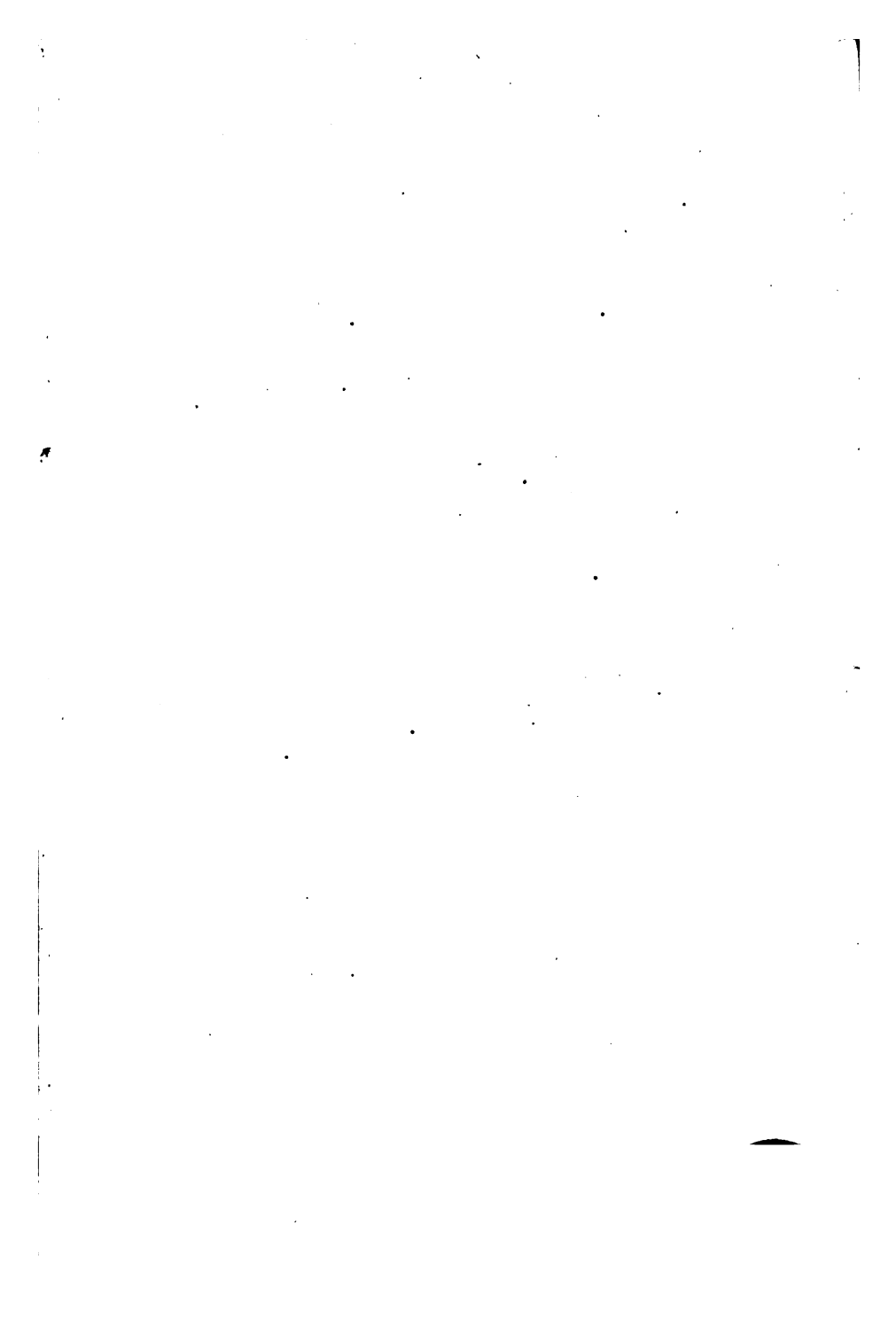
The superior was probably sixty years old; his features were fine, strongly marked, and fittingly framed by his snow-white, luxuriant hair; his white beard hung down to his waist, resting like a huge snow-flake upon the thick folds of his black habit, which covered him from head to foot. Like the priests of the Greek Church, he wore a sort of mitre of black felt, with a long veil attached to it, which,

when thrown back, protected his neck and shoulders from the sun. The superior presented to us the other monks, the more important among them having joined us in the reception room. More dialogues in gesture, more smiles. They were mostly old men, and their faces expressed supreme gentleness; all their equipment consisted of a large rosary, and a book of Psalms written in Greek and Arabic. The hospitable reception of pilgrims and travellers is not the only occupation of these good monks; they are also engaged in deep study of the rare works and incomparable manuscripts contained in the convent library.

This wonderful library is ordinarily accessible to the monks only, but our quality of painters, and the magnificent proportions of our official dromedaries, smoothed away all difficulties. The superior himself conducted us to the library, and brushed away the dust for us from the most curious among the store of parchments and papyrus.

A 'Life of the Saints,' profusely adorned with paintings and portraits, especially attracted our admiration, by the purity of the designs, and the brilliancy of the colours. These manuscripts in themselves would richly repay the journey, and we obtained permission

to study them at our leisure. We were also shown the four Gospels, entirely written, they told us, by the Emperor Theodore's hand. Their bindings are as remarkable for taste as for richness. Some of them, in carved wood, are covered with gold and silver ornaments exquisitely wrought. But we had not come to see the library only, and we made a formal visit to the remainder of the convent, and the holy places which belong to it. In addition to the principal church, the convent is divided into a number of chapels, each under the invocation of a special saint, and all connected together by corridors. Each chapel also communicates with a cell, so that every father has, so to speak, his own little private oratory. The principal church is like a basilica, divided into separate chapels, and with its *jube* divided from the rest of the nave by a wall, and richly ornamented wood-work. A colossal figure of Christ, surrounded by other images brilliantly painted on a golden ground in the Russian style, overlooks the choir. Very elegant lamps, of copper and silver, hang from the roof, and have no doubt occasionally tempted pilgrim amateurs, for the monks do not permit their visitors to remain long within reach of those precious objects of art. It would be difficult to say what is the predominant style of architecture in this building, which is as much Byzantine as Roman,





MONKS OF THE CONVENT OF SINAI.

and where restorations in the newest style are mixed up with the remains of ornamentation of the most primitive and incongruous kinds. It is said that the mosaics came from St. Sophia, and, when we consider the dilapidation of the latter edifice, this seems very possible.

All of a sudden, the monks who accompanied us assumed a solemn demeanour, and apprised us that we were about to be admitted into the sanctuary where God appeared to Moses. The altar in this little chapel is placed where the burning bush stood. A bright light reflected in a plate of gold is the emblem of the sublime apparition; and it was with gestures of respect and awe that the monks withdrew for us the veil which hides the little flame from profane eyes. This is the most curious and richly ornamented of all the chapels. The light is softened by coloured windows; it would otherwise destroy the poetic charm of this sacred place. Our stockinged feet rested on Persian carpets, and we stood before the burning bush with our boots in our hands, in the very place where the custom originated at the command of God—'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is Holy Ground.'

In one of the two adjacent chapels, which, with the convent, are placed under the invocation of St.

Catharine, we were shown two wooden coffers in which were enclosed two silver coffins of great value, the silver finely wrought, and incrustcd with enamels, gold, and precious stones. These curious art objects were presented by the great Catharine of Russia, and one of them contains the remains of the saint whose name the empress bore. The other contains golden images and heaps of precious stones—gifts and offerings from illustrious pilgrims, or great Muscovite personages. In the presence of these regal treasures, and these piles of gold, we felt ourselves carried back to the days of Perrault's fairy tales ; and we understood how necessary is the vigilance of the monks, how indispensable are the formidable ramparts which protect their convent. Several attempts at assaulting it by surprise have already been made by the Arabs, who are perfectly aware that it contains immense wealth—the accumulation of centuries.

The door of the church is very curious as a work of art. It is formed of panels of carved wood, and resembles an exquisite lacework frame, in which are set marvellous enamels, each encircled by silvered iron-work, which produces a brilliant effect. On coming out, the monks bade us observe the ruins of a mosque, which the Turkish authorities had forced them to have built in the interior of their convent, as a sign of the

Ottoman supremacy. As the Arabs never entered their precincts, this fragment of Mussulman construction is quite useless, and in a state of complete abandonment, which the Government tolerates, provided that the crescent of the Prophet is never absent from its little cupola.

On the following day I made a pilgrimage at the foot of Mount Horeb to the miraculous rock, entirely detached from the mountain, which is believed to be that whence Moses caused living water to flow, by striking it twice with his rod. Three holes indicate the orifices through which the water rushed, and long perpendicular grooves hollowed out by the flowing of the spring are still quite visible. A little garden has been made not far off, and a dilapidated chapel stands within the enclosure. The interior of the small sanctuary is adorned with a number of allegorical pictures of the principal passages in Genesis, and of the life of Moses. Portraits of the patriarchs, each more hideous than the other, detract considerably from the solemnity of the scene.

The monks came several times to return our visits, and our camp was not deficient in animation. The information which they afforded us concerning the country was also most interesting to us, and destined

to be very useful in our onward journey to Abakah. The monks, thanks to their alms and their erudition, are held in high esteem by all the tribes of the peninsula, who sometimes come to consult them, and take them for arbitrators in their disputes. On our departure they kept order, and appeased the contests which had arisen among our camel-drivers. The monks of the convent had spoken; everything settled itself as if by magic.

The valley formed in this place by Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai is especially endowed with that dreadful quality proper to all mountainous countries, extremes of heat and of cold. We had already met with hoar frost in the clefts of rocks which lay burning under the sun, and found ourselves, much to our astonishment, walking in snow, in thirty-eight degrees (Réaumur) of heat; but what struck us in this instance more particularly was the intense cold of the nights and the mornings, while the sun's rays were intercepted by the mountains. We were no longer astonished at the furred pelisses of the monks, or the stoves which warmed their cells. Our first night in camp was terribly cold. Our camel-drivers were convoked, and we set to work to build up an enormous fire. All the bushes, roots, and rubbish in the valley were heaped

up on it ; the flame rose far above the camp, and flung fantastic shadows on the side of Sinai. And yet we suffered extremely, and exclaimed against this icy East, of which travellers had not told the truth. Our poor dromedaries were in a miserable state. In their distress they lay in a heap upon one another, trying to get a little warmth. We had to go to the convent to wash ourselves in the morning, for the water in camp had turned to ice.

During our sojourn at Sinai, we held a great festivity in honour of our dear doctor's *fête* day. We conspired, excluding our doctor, with the cook and his assistants, for the arrangement of a Sardapanian banquet, which should do away with popular prejudices respecting the privations and sufferings of the desert—two soups, four *entrées*, three roasts, several salads, a profuse dessert, and, above all, mustard at discretion !

At dessert on this memorable day, as on all grand occasions, all our playthings came out of their boxes. Cards, loto, bézique, the humming-top game—all those things in which children and grown-up people alike take delight. Exquisite wines were served in glasses of all sizes; a formidable pool at *écarté*, at which nobody paid, was made up ; and the most national melodies

ever inspired by any country called out the terrible echoes of the mountains. The good monks had received an invitation to this festival, which they did not disdain to accept. We smoked, we sang, we drank, until the small hours ; then, as an expiation for our disorderly revels, we consecrated the whole of the following day to the perilous ascent of the holy mountain. Several of our party shrank from this difficult undertaking, which meant at least as much fatigue as we had undergone at the Pyramids ; and we should not have any Arabs to help us, among the angular and slippery rocks.

Sinai, essentially granitic, presents the aspect of a mountain bristling with teeth, ridges, and crevasses, due to the action of fire, and to violent volcanic convulsions. The colouring of this granite is red from top to bottom, which renders the mountain terrible and imposing. The monks had endeavoured to form a sort of stair up its side, but this Cyclopean labour had to be recommenced year by year, as the melting of the snows and the rushing of the torrents carried away the stones which the fathers had employed to mark out the route. To organise a system of steps in the rock itself, mining would have been necessary, and powder is too scarce and precious.

in this desert country to be thus employed in such material work. After we had laboriously climbed Mount Horeb, which serves as a counterfort to Sinai, we began a more difficult ascent. The path was less marked, and the sharp rocks to which we clung were more and more slippery. Our boots suffered so severely in this journey, that we wondered how the bare feet of the holy patriarch had fared among these razor-blades. Half-way up, on an isolated platform, we came to the solitary cypress of the mountain, which serves for the traveller's landmark, enabling him to calculate the distance he has still to accomplish, and to find his way back. Here we halted for the first time, and sat down to breathe. Sinai is reputed to be peopled with serpents and enormous lizards. We probably owed it to the intense cold that we did not see a single reptile of any kind. We only met on our route the plant which produces manna, and which the monks collect with the utmost care.

The manna of Sinai is said to be very superior to that which grows elsewhere, and the convent of Saint Catharine would certainly have a medal for it, if the Arabs ever thought of an Exhibition. But they are above everything of that kind. We tasted this singular

aliment, whose peculiarity is that it has no taste at all. We were impatient to get to the mountain-top : it was not done without trouble, but the spectacle which awaited us was ample compensation for anything.

The summit of Sinai forms an almost flat plateau, from which the widest panorama which ever stretched out before my gaze, was unfolded all around us : the two arms of the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf joining at the extremity of the tongue of land, and letting the opposite shores of the two seas be seen through the silver mist which mingled with the water. On our left and right were the convergent crests of all the Sinaitic chains of the Peninsula.

Mount Serbal and Djebel-Catharine seemed to tower over Sinai itself considerably, though they present a less imposing aspect than that of the Holy Mountain. An immense slab, of natural formation, is pointed out as the place where God appeared to Moses, and the tables of the law were given. It is certain that the locality answers precisely to the Bible record ; and nothing made a greater impression on me than those rent, yawning, peaked rocks all the way down to the valley of Raphidim, where the people of Israel awaited the return of the holy patriarch. From this

point we were shown the place where Moses, sustained by two Levites, held up his hands during the battle in which Amalek was defeated by the army of Israel.

A little Greek chapel is built upon the platform, and every Sunday one of the monks comes thither to celebrate mass. A few steps beyond the chapel, the Mussulmans, jealous of the Christian recollections attached to the mountain, have installed the before-mentioned never finished mosque, now in ruins, where they exhibit the print of the foot of the Prophet's camel. As the ascent is utterly impossible for a dromedary, the authenticity of the mark is doubtful; unless it be that of the sole of the Prophet himself. But, if so, what a foot!

In the Greek chapel, which is the grotto in which Moses hid himself that he might not see God face to face, a pious legend also points out the mark of the head of the terrified patriarch. Here one is forced to think, not 'What a head!' but 'What a bump he must have raised upon it!' By the help of a geological hammer, which accompanied me in the desert as invariably as the neckties at sixpence each did at Fayoum, I detached chips of the sacred platform on which Moses prostrated himself, and I brought away these precious relics with all the other

historical pebbles, which turned my trunk into a stone quarry. After we had feasted our eyes on the grand spectacle beneath our feet, we proceeded to discuss a meal in which manna had no place, and then ensued a religious discussion, appropriate to this desert plateau, and which beguiled our sense of fatigue. There were 'fors' and 'againsts,' and the most learned theologians could have come to no conclusion from our arguments. Coffee and liqueurs were abundant, our polemic became very lively, and it was only by exerting all our self-command that we refrained from throwing each other down from the top of the mountain, where so many terrible things had already occurred. One of the orators had a happy thought ! He turned the conference into a general chorus of songs, and we descended from the summit of the mountain in perfect harmony.

Half-way down Sinai, and before we began the descent of Mount Horeb, we were shown the rock on which the prophet Elijah remained for forty days, during which he was fed by ravens. We gathered some grass and flowers at this spot, and brought them back to the camp, where our return was saluted by a bonfire, for which everything in the shape of possible fuel which remained in the valley was re-

quisitioned by our Arabs. We rolled ourselves up in our coverings that night with unprecedented satisfaction. The next day we passed at the convent, where we had not yet been admitted to the garden. All the trees were in blossom, and the red and white bunches adorning the branches contrasted strangely with the desolation which reigned around this little paradise. The rich mould which accounted for its incredible fertility had been brought from Egypt on camel-back, so we could form an idea of the time and patience which had arrived at such a result. Arbours, symmetrically arranged and covered with vines, transported us in imagination to the too formal villas in the environs of Paris.

A low door in the centre seemed as if it must lead to a cellar. We guessed in the right direction; it was the entrance to the monks' cemetery. The learned Robinson, who was permitted to see it, has given a curious description of this abode of the dead, which is divided into two separate compartments, filled with the bones of the monks and the brethren. The bones of each skeleton, having been disarticulated, are arranged in categories, the heads apart, the tibiae together, and so on through all the limbs. The patriarchs only are preserved complete in boxes

which resemble the sarcophagi of the Egyptian mummies.

We had come at the wrong season for tasting the fruit of this delicious garden, in which there seems to be a specimen of every kind of tree, but, judging by the flowers, the next fruit harvest will be plentiful. The fathers gave us some delicious vegetables, which were most welcome, considering that we had been deprived of every kind of green thing since we left Cairo. They also presented each of us with a little bag of manna, and a small tin tube filled with honey made by the bees of the Holy Mountain.

When we contemplated this little congregation of Religious, who, thus hidden in the mountains, want for nothing and can even bestow very liberal hospitality, we could not but ask whence did they derive their ease of circumstances, their perfectly tranquil demeanour, in the midst of an absolutely desert land? The revenues of the convent are derived from farms which the Community possess in the Isle of Cyprus and in Crete, and also from rich donations made to them by several Empresses of Russia and by rich pilgrims. It is not without reason that the Arabs covet the treasures accumulated in the convent; but all Russia watches over the monks, and any indiscre-

tion would be severely punished. On the day before our departure, we went to pay a farewell visit to the good monks. We had taken their photographs, and exchanged pledges of eternal friendship, and now we were about to conform to custom, and enter our names on the register in which the names of all the pilgrims who visit the convent are inscribed. We found ourselves in familiar company when the scroll was opened, though the French are in the minority among visitors to Sinai, where the English are much better known. On that occasion we were shown the signature of General Bonaparte, at the end of a firman written by his own hand, by which the convent is entitled to a protection which has not yet quite lost its prestige among the tribes of the Peninsula.

At last, we were obliged to tear ourselves away from our hospitable entertainers. Our pockets were crammed for the last time with uneatable sweetmeats, our bakshish was gratefully accepted, and we parted, with mutual regard and regret.

'When you come back,' said the Superior, 'you shall taste a special wine that I made myself.'

Taib ! Taib ! Taib !

'When you look in at Bougival, you shall have a row on the Seine, and we will show you great things.'

The presence of the Superior was not without its useful influence in inducing our camel-drivers to start. They were to be taken far away from their tribes by our journey to Abakah, and they were not particularly zealous when it came to the loading of the camels with our formidable baggage.

Wadi-Saal, which lay in our road, had nothing very new to show us, except the perspective of a fresh series of narrow gorges and *wadis* like those which we had already seen. The Arabs regard it as a very important place, because the valley contains the tomb of a highly venerated scheik. The possession of the 'marabout' of Scheik Salok is, we were told, an eternal pretext for war amongst the jealous tribes. The country is much less desolate than the part of the Peninsula which divides Sinai from the city of Suez. Our dromedaries plucked up their spirits at the sight of the tamarisks and the grey-leaved fluttering shrubs. We were not so gay, for we still felt sad at parting with our good monks, and a long unknown journey lay before us. We inaugurated our first encampment by a long sleep. Like the Hebrews in the desert, we had our fits of discouragement, but they soon passed off. A great surprise awaited us next day at *Wadi-Schkattah*.

At the outlet of the valley, the mountains seem to change their direction suddenly, and, stretching out on either side, they give place to an immense plain of white and red sand. We found ourselves in front of an Indian city, with its towers, its pagodas, its minarets and its domes. Graduated stages supported these gigantic constructions, and doubled their prodigious effect. Elephants only were needed to complete the illusion, for it was a natural mountain at which we were looking.

Regularly laid terraces and details of sculpture marked themselves out so distinctly that we made a long round, in order to get near the mountain and correct the delusion of our eyes. The regulation of our stages to Abakah did not admit of our making a long sojourn in this place, which we regretted very much, for we should have been glad to take back several studies of this wonderful panorama. The seeming Babylon appeared to be surmounted by colossal walls flanked by crenelated towers; and was lost on the horizon in another series of plateaux, still more vivid in colour, which added to the natural appearance of this mirage of a huge city standing against mountains of still greater height.

Wadi-Ain, which we were to reach, on the same

day, had to offer us as sole compensation for the magnificent spectacle we were leaving behind, the prospect of an abundant spring, shaded by palm-trees, in which we might bathe at our pleasure. But this limpid water concealed a danger which we happily perceived in time ; it contained myriads of tiny leeches which might have injured us very severely. Our dromedaries and camels, who were not so particular, swallowed the creatures in hundreds, and we had great difficulty in getting them away from the water.

We were unconsciously flying from the leeches to a greater danger, for that part of the coast of the gulf of Abakah is literally infested with sharks. It was not until after we had taken our first sea-bath with intense pleasure, that our Arabs communicated that little fact ; but one cannot think of everything at a time when one is only a camel-driver. These dangerous coasts owe the terrible number of the sharks near them to the multitude of fish in the gulf. The limpidity and tranquillity of the water permit the fishermen to discern the fish distinctly from the shore, and under these easy conditions the Arabs catch them with nets and lines, almost with their hands. The aspect of the coast is entirely different

from that of the borders of the Red Sea on the Suez side ; there are no horrid pebbles and sharp rocks ; they are replaced by fine pink sand which reminds one of Trouville. The ground is strewn with shells of the most brilliant and varied colours, which look like enormous flowers carried in by the waves. We saw a great number of blocks of coral in course of formation, looking like scarlet sponges, and producing a most brilliant effect. It is this natural production which adorns its bed, that has given its name to the Red Sea. A sufficiency of arable land, and a fair supply of water, attract the Arabs to the sea coasts. Their only industry is fishing in this sea, calmer than a lake. On the day of our arrival, two fishermen presented themselves to us in full dress, that is to say, carrying their nets, and a long line for big fish. I could not have believed that men could be so like monkeys ; their abrupt gestures, their blinking eyes, and the horrible contraction of their jaws when they spoke, made us hesitate, at first, to acknowledge them as brethren ; but when we beheld their tailless backs we doubted no longer.

We were simple enough to offer them payment for their fish in money, but they would not leave their merchandise otherwise than in exchange for edible

articles. It was not unreasonable after all ; for they had neither pockets nor purses. We were much interested, in these two gorillas, who were genuine savages. We made them eat, and as we thought they ought also to drink, we offered them a mug of fresh water.

‘Thank you,’ said the fisherman, ‘ I drank yesterday !’ We little expected such a lesson in sobriety, and the gorilla seemed so convinced of the perfect reasonableness of his reply, that we could not insist. He did make up his mind ultimately to drink a small glass of brandy, which probably made him see heaven open, for he jumped with joy in a most extravagant fashion. The fish, which were roasted by hot stones laid upon them like plasters, were excellent. We explained to our apes that we should be very glad indeed to have a further supply, and that if they would accompany us in the character of fish purveyors to the camp, we would treat them well, and stuff them with food. This proposal met their wishes, and they accepted it, and simultaneously set off in the direction of our proposed encampment, so that they might fish before our arrival. Just like frogs, they jumped into the water, disappeared, and then returned to the shore to ascertain the contents of their nets. This method of fishing amused us mightily, and we were

following them foot along the coast, when they made us a sign to come near, and pointed to a spot where our inexperienced eyes at first failed to perceive anything but a greyish mass, floating close to the water's edge. It was a huge ray, perhaps five yards long, which, almost stranded, was devouring the small fish which people the shore. The Arabs hemmed in the monster very adroitly, and as our only fishing-rods were our revolvers, we pushed our dromedaries into the water up to their girths, and were just about to fire at the fish within a yard of it, when it made a tremendous bound, and swam out into the open sea, to the general surprise.

Fishing with pistols on dromedary-back is, it must be confessed, a novel sport. Our attention was soon attracted from our discomfiture by the sight at a very short distance of a great number of little silver fish, which were fluttering over the water, disappearing and reappearing farther off, like a cloud of butterflies. This singular spectacle was explained by the presence of the larger fish which prey upon these little creatures, which thus try to put the enemy off their track, and escape from pursuit. At this part of the gulf, we came opposite to a charming little island, on which are to be seen the ruins of a strong castle, and

a tolerably well-preserved convent. The island is called Kourieh. It was an important strategical point formerly, at the time when the gulf of Abakah was more frequented, and served as a passage for all the caravans coming from Arabia and India. Unfortunately it is now the centre of operations for the sharks, and many accidents have happened there through the imprudence of travellers who would persist in swimming from the shore to the island. We bathed there, but with the utmost precaution. This was our penultimate stage before arriving at Abakah, and our impatience induced us to pass too quickly by this charming portion of the gulf, which well deserves more leisurely examination. The mountains, whose slopes stretch downwards into the sea, are most imposing in their grand horizontal lines, for they are no longer the angular summits, the yawning scarred rocks of the wadis, but immense plateaux laid one upon the other, from whence fall showers of sand, which looks at a distance like snow, so brilliant is its whiteness. The pink colouring of the ground, the pearl grey and tender green of the bushes, give the landscape a wondrously harmonious aspect. There we saw for the first time a kind of palm-tree which bears a thousand branches grafted into a single

trunk, and which produces a kind of almond which we vainly endeavoured to eat, but to which the Arabs attribute the gift of preservation against sickness, and especially against the evil eye.

We were arriving at the end of our journey, and we had no eyes except for the other side of the gulf, on which we could trace the city of Abakah afar off, defined against a magnificent grove of palm-trees. Our attention was, however, forcibly diverted by strange heaps of stones symmetrically ranged across the path which we were following.

The stones are laid thus by the Arabs, as additional landmarks between their respective little states, in a country where the mountains touch the sky, and form impassable barriers between the tribes.

Having jumped over these card-board fences, we ceased to be under the safeguard of the scheik who had accompanied us thus far. We were entering upon a new territory, and we were about to have to reckon with new authorities both military and civil, of a much more serious character. To have overturned one of these little party-walls would have been a pretext sufficient to bring about a declaration of war, and to have given the signal for sanguinary reprisals all over the country. As may be supposed, we treated the

trumpery barriers, all this having been explained to us, with profound respect.

At this point of our journey, our dragoman, having taken possession of a bottle of brandy that had fallen out of the canteen, which had slipped from its moorings on the side of one of the baggage camels, got profoundly drunk, and took us into his confidence with respect to his intentions of robbing the travellers, quite conscientiously and allowably, of course; and also, of not paying the camel-drivers. He also reposed in us inconceivable confidences respecting his private life, during which entertainment he was protected by the god of drunkards, for he was several times within an ace of tumbling off his dromedary.

We had kept all the way along the edge of the sea, and had now reached the extremity of the gulf. Since morning we had been gazing at the palm-grove in which the village of Abakah is half hidden, as if it were the Promised Land, and no stage of our journey had ever seemed so long as this one.

Well, we arrived at last.



SKETCH XIV.

EL ABAKAH.

Scheik Mohammed Gadd—The Son of an Independent Scheik—A
String of Red Arabs—Flowers and Scents.

ABAKAH is undoubtedly that point in all our desert journey which has left the deepest impression upon us, by the wild and picturesque character of everything about it, from the many-coloured costumes of its inhabitants to its strange buildings framed in such wonderful surroundings.

Before us lay the blue sea, with palm-trees descending to the verge of its transparent waves, in a rich growth which reminded us of the most thickly-wooded portions of Fayoum; and earthen dwellings built in regular lines, with doors surmounted by ornaments in an almost barbarous Arab style. We found the types of the population were different from any that we had yet seen; the men being tall and strong, wearing their long red robes gracefully; with a black

kouffie covering the head, which increased the already fierce expression of their bold and manly countenances. No doubt there were representatives of many tribes among them, for the skins of some of these Arabs were very fair, and we remarked their striking analogy in several respects with the personal appearance of our European relatives. We had hardly pitched our camp under the foremost of the palm-trees, before a numerous deputation came to visit and welcome us, and, above all, to find out what resources we were in a position to offer to their industrial pursuits as robbers and pillagers. By general consent they concentrated their interest upon our cooking tent, into which they swarmed. The most redoubtable scheiks of the district were of the party, and they insisted on being served with an interminable series of cups of coffee and glasses of brandy. Our poor cook, Achmet, was quite unequal to the demands of these gentlemen, who pried into, and handled everything they could lay their hands on, like chimpanzees.

Our departure from Suez had been signalled by a system of telegraphy known only to the Arabs, and practised exclusively by them; the number and quality of our official dromedaries, the number of our

tents and our fowls, had all been accurately reported. They had been expecting us for fully a month, judging by the extraordinary reception with which they astonished us ; for grand fireworks were displayed and many guns were discharged in honour of us, during the evening. We were not to be presented to the scheik of Abakah until the following morning. Upon enquiring the reason of this delay, we were informed that the scheik had gone to steal camels from the neighbouring tribes, and had not yet returned. It was his son who explained to us the cause of the absence of the prince, his father.

On the evening of our arrival, the young governor of Abakah came to visit us, accompanied by his Grand Master of Artillery, and the principal officers of his military establishment. The Grand Master was distinguished from the others only by carrying a long pole, at the end of which a lighted wick glimmered faintly. It was probably intended to light the dozen of squibs which were to be fired off in our honour. The governor was about thirty years of age, and did not seem by any means delighted with his official post in this place, where his authority was very trifling, in comparison with that of the great scheik who was absent on a stealing expedition. His duty, as repre-

senting the Viceroy, was to secure the victualling of the caravan to Mecca, on its journey thither and on its return.

All the pilgrims are obliged to halt in this place, in consequence of the features of the desert through which they must journey, and they usually reach this station after having exhausted their stores of food and water. In order to save them from the consequences of such pious imprudence, the Government has established this colossal *buffet* in the desert. The festival, the fireworks, and the illuminations had lasted until very late, and we were anxious to get to sleep, under the safeguard of these brigands, armed to the teeth, to whom we had tried to be exceedingly amiable. It was, perhaps, five o'clock in the morning, and we were all sleeping soundly, when our dragoon came, in a great flurry, to arouse us, and to announce the arrival of the great scheik himself, Mohammed Gadd, the fattest, most terrible; and ugliest of men.

The scheik, mounted on a handsome mare, with deep housings ornamented with fringe of silk and gold, was followed by a number of men heavily armed, and arrayed in the red robes which we had observed on the preceding evening. An immense

pistol, attached to a leathern strap, dragged behind him on the ground, producing a terrible clatter upon the stones ; in his left hand he held an enormously long lance, adorned with bunches of ostrich plumes, while with his right he scratched himself energetically, through an aperture in the breast of his gown.

He let himself fall off his horse, rather than dismounted, and, his chibouk in his mouth, with the air of a man who perfectly understood his importance, he came into the tent where we should have received him, but not finding us there, he pushed on into the kitchen, and instantly required to be served with everything eatable which it contained. We were completely taken by surprise, and the dragoman was extremely distressed by the necessity for keeping Mohammed Gadd waiting. Our chief, who had been much fatigued on the previous day, was exasperated at being suddenly awakened ; and the dragoman, more and more uneasy, exhorted us to the utmost courtesy, in consideration of the necessity which we were under of living on the territory of these robbers. While we were hurriedly putting on our indispensable garments, the dragoman came to repeat the flattering terms in which the great scheik had been pleased to

speaking of our visit, while he was devouring everything which the cook had not been able to put out of his reach.

If we had not come in, he would have emptied our canteens, for he did not disdain to do the honours of our kitchen to his suite, and was busily handing about liquor in cups and glasses to the numerous friends and brethren who formed his escort.

At the sound of our approach, he instantly decamped, like a child surprised at the jam closet, and hurried into the *salon*, where we found him installed in state, with his mouth full, and one of our biscuits in his hand. The most extravagant compliments were exchanged through the medium of the dragoman. In the midst of the stars we were planets, suns, pearls of the East ; Victor Hugo would have been nowhere on this occasion. In reply to all these fine things, our chief said to the dragoman : 'Tell him, that now that I have seen him, I am going to have a happy day, and in order to begin it at once, I am going to bed.' As he said, so he did ; and the great Mohammed Gadd was deeply gratified by so delicate an attention. We had to remain with him, to hand the ever-moving cups, and the sugar-basin, into which, in order to simplify matters, he poured his coffee.

We passed the time in a reciprocal examination of our costumes, and our visitor was especially pleased with our boots. His own were superb, being of a deep red colour, and so large that he had to paddle them, like boats, to drag them along with his feet. We showed our revolvers, and he showed us his sword, which was a wonderful weapon, exquisitely graven and inlaid with gold, an heirloom in his family from the time of Abou Bekr. During all this time, the consumption of coffee, cognac, and liqueurs was uninterrupted, and we received with dismay the scheik's intimation that he would shortly pay us another visit. He fulfilled his threat, for he had hardly been gone an hour, when once more we heard the noise of his trailing pistol upon the stones, and he returned accompanied by a fresh series of scheiks—redder, more important, and thirstier than the first. Our unfortunate cook uttered groans of anguish, and raised his hands to heaven, for the circulation of cups and glasses was brisker than before. On this auspicious occasion, Mohammed Gadd presented his brother to us, Scheik Mak Boul, a small, thin, dry, black man, who was to accompany us to Petra, and secure a friendly reception for us from the tribes.

Abakah is now the most important town in the

whole of Arabia Petraea. It is certainly more considerable than the town of Petra, which is only a great city in ruins, a den of thieves and brigands, who are dignified with the name of unsubjugated tribes. The exceptional situation, and the marvellous fertility of its environs, contribute to the belief that this town is the site of the ancient *Elana*, known to the Hebrews under the name of *Elath*, and mentioned in *Exodus*. Our sojourn was actively employed, and we made a number of most interesting studies. The stubborn tribes of this part of Arabia kept the troops of *Mehemet Ali* for some time in check. He avenged himself by having the palm-trees in the district and along the gulf cut down, thus destroying all the wealth of the country for several years. Stealing camels and cutting down palm-trees constitute the main acts of the warfare waged against each other by these tribes; for, being profoundly cowardly as individuals, the Arabs rarely show fight face to face. They will readily shoot at stragglers, from behind a rock, or throw down pieces of the mountain on each other's head, but their strategy, while they are awaiting picrate of potass and petroleum pumps, amounts to no more than this. The governor of the fortress invited us to visit his

little citadel. It occupies the south-west part of the town, and is surrounded by large ditches. Its high walls are flanked by towers, where four old cannon terrify the tribes by their mere aspect. The Grand Master of Artillery gave us an elaborate explanation of his system of defence in case of attack, but we were somewhat incredulous, as we had chanced to ascertain that the balls were three times too large for the guns. The casemates and interior galleries of the castle had a grim wildness about them, which pleased us very much. They recalled the descriptions in 'Salambo,' by their formidable bars of iron, their pikes, their enormous lances, and rusty swords, which might date from the creation of the world, so barbarous and primitive are their forms.

They showed us piles of stones laid close to the ramparts, for the purpose of being hurled down on assailants, exactly as in the middle ages; a boiler full of oil, ready to be heated, and plenty of torches destined to set fire to the town, if necessary. If they had only had Greek fire, their engines of destruction would have been complete. The prisons of this fortress were likewise an exhilarating spectacle, but we escaped the sight of the instruments

of torture used upon prisoners. A row of gibbets in the courtyard, ranged like gaslamps, serve for the execution of military offenders in the garrison.

The Governor of Abakah is only the servant of the Government of Cairo, and the post is not much coveted by young Egyptian diplomatists. This confidential mission is frequently the result of disgrace, or a necessary exile consequent upon excesses in *roulette*, and *trente-et-quarante*. We could not make out what was the special case of our entertainer, but, judging by the sighs which he heaved whenever we spoke of Cairo or Paris, his exile must have weighed heavily upon his spirits. By way of thanks for his kind reception, we took his photograph twice, and invited him to dinner with his colleague Mohammed Gadd. That dinner was a hideous spectacle. They very nearly maimed their fingers with the forks, which they at first tried to use. They got on better with the spoons, which were more accommodating ; but the viands of our predilection were not at all to their taste. They revelled in English mustard, red pepper, and onions, with unspeakable enjoyment, devouring them by spoonfuls. The scheik distributed them liberally all over his beard and stomach, but, nothing intimidated, when he had emptied one pot of mustard,

he eagerly asked for another, like a child coaxing for bonbons.

Then began a guttural concert of satisfaction, which we expected, and which indicated their gratitude. Under pain of death we dared not laugh, and so we disguised our urgent longing to do so by a successful imitation of the indescribable sounds.

While we stayed at Abakah, we made a friend of Scheik Mak Boul's son—the nephew of Mohammed Gadd himself. This boy—only ten years old—had a remarkably fine and expressive face. His gentle disposition won our affection, and consoled us for the fierce aspect of his relatives; and he drank neither coffee nor brandy, which was a strong title to our esteem. He was to follow our route, with his father, but only so far as the principal camp of his tribe. On the day after our dinner party, we were to start for Petra; and it was not without regret that we contemplated parting with our superb dromedaries, and mounting simple camels, whose speed would be much less, and their gait far more fatiguing.

Our adieux to our camel-drivers and our dromedaries were really touching. Two soldiers who had accompanied us received bakshish, which so far surpassed their most sanguine hopes, that they nearly lost their

senses with joy ; for our chief reckoned out to each of them one hundred francs in ten-franc gold pieces. At the sight of each coin their eyes grew larger with admiration ; and when all were counted, each man remained with his hand open, and his mouth gaping, unable to believe that all this fortune was for himself only. In his whole life he had certainly never seen so much gold at one time, even in a picture.

The delight of these good fellows was indescribable. They could find no words sufficiently gigantic or Oriental to express their regret at leaving us. A last hand shake, a last look, and we had parted, promising to meet again some day, and somewhere.

We took our way to the north-east, once more entering upon a series of *wadis*, the mountains of which they were formed being of a dark yellow colour, more odd than agreeable to the eye. The only incident which enlivened our first halt was the appearance of a flock of partridges, which gave us the first opportunity of using our guns we had had since we left Fidémine-el-Fayoum. These partridges, as large as our finest fowls, and which the Arabs do not shoot because they have not powder, do not resemble our partridges in flavour. Their flesh is tough, but we were very glad to get them. They are of a grey colour, which makes

it at first difficult to distinguish them from the soil, but the Arabs have good eyes, and they pointed them out to us eagerly.

Our new camel-drivers, belonged to tribes of much more lively dispositions than, those of the Sinaitic peninsula. Accordingly, they loaded their camels and pitched our tents to the accompaniment of songs. The concert was after the following fashion :—

One of the Arabs sang the verses, and all the others took up the chorus. There were questions and answers, as in the tragedies of Sophocles. I asked for a translation of some of these strophes, and found that the poetry and the metaphors reminded me strongly of the sublimities of 'L'Homme qui rit' and 'Les Travailleurs de la Mer.'

Here is a slice, just the merest taste.

Solo. He is there! He is there! He is there!

The Chorus. Who? Who? Who? Who?

Solo. The enemy of the tribe. I do not see him, he sees me. Presently I shall see him, and he will not see me:

Coucou. There he is!

And so on, for hours; and they do not drink anything all the time!

Here is another Hugo-Arabic idiotism of the same

stamp : 'It is a lion, who is a wolf ; for I, a wolf, am a lion, and I shall conquer him by my strength.'

'His children shall be the slaves of our children, unless indeed they are their masters.'

These war chants are not unlike the harmless combats of the Arabs among themselves, of which we had a specimen at Petra. They are so afraid of hurting themselves that they are satisfied with uttering piercing cries, and making terrible gestures, after which they embrace each other and invoke Allah, thanking him for the victory which they have all gained—over themselves. These periodical and obligatory vocal concerts amused us at first ; sometimes we joined in them, improvising our parts, but at the eighth halt, we had been driven to desperation by them, and had to resort to the most skilful diplomacy in order to make the performers understand that our nerves had given way under the charms of their poetry. On the very same evening we were surprised to hear them beginning again, as fresh as ever. They were quite astonished when we remonstrated with them, and explained that they were now singing prose, and had even changed the tune in order to give us pleasure. We were unwilling to annoy them, and submitted, resolving to endure to

the end, and only entreating them to sing in a lower key.

The great Mohammed Gadd had accompanied us lance in hand, mounted on his war mare, whose speed he endeavoured to accelerate by cries and gestures, for the poor animal could hardly keep up, under his weight, with the lengthy steps of our camels. At the entrance to *Wadi-Guerra* the scheik took leave of us, leaving us for guides Mak Boul and his young son. The child sat behind his father's saddle, with a little gazelle in his arms, which he nursed like a doll.

In order to inspire our new leader with greater confidence, we invited him and his son to take their meals with us. We had every reason to congratulate ourselves on this wise proceeding, which secured to us the zealous exercise of his authority in all the troublesome affairs which lay before us in Petra.

By degrees, as we increased our distance from the desert of Thi, upon our left the country became more and more verdant. Tall grasses, and flowers of all colours softened the yellows and reds of the rocks. And the silver-leaved shrubs against the background of deep-hued mountain looked still more metallic than upon the sand where we had already seen them.

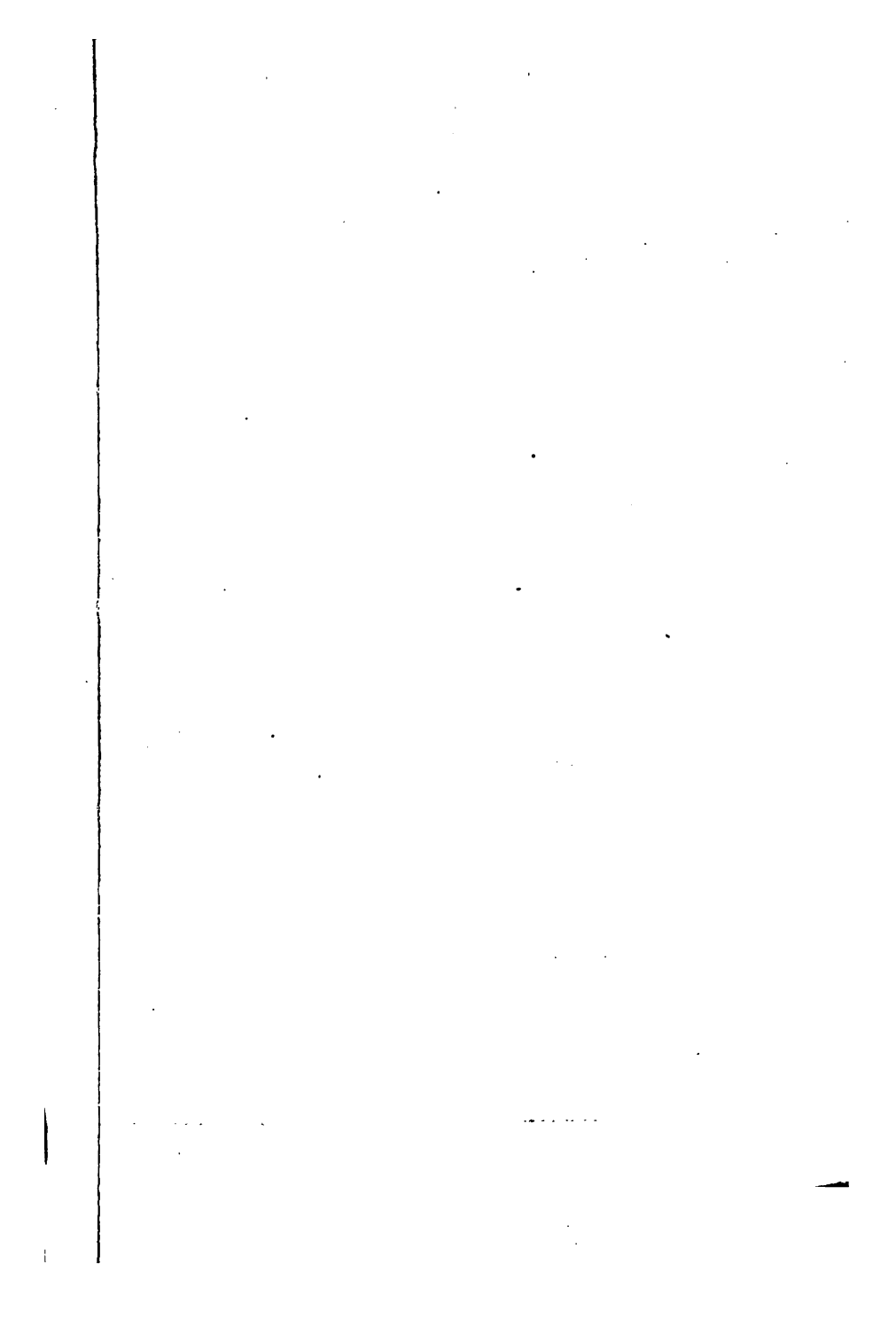
A little to our right *Djebel Isagra* rose above the

horizon. Our camp was pitched in a natural circus formed by the rocks. We found there numerous flocks—sheep, camels, and goats—seeking, like ourselves, shelter from the violence of the wind. Among these animal's of Noah's Ark, we might choose, and we adopted a young camel, abandoned by its mother. It looked like a large goat, and it became rapidly even too tame and familiar, for it walked about the tents with perfect composure, and even occasionally took a roll upon our beds. We called this foundling Eliakim. The little mountain sanctuary was propitious to photography, so we proceeded on the very day of our arrival to reproduce the chief camel-drivers of our escort. The country became more and more green ; it was an ocean of shrubs, with equal spaces dividing them all, whose quivering foliage lent the desert the aspect of a fleecy and troubled sea.

Our camels revelled in this rich vegetation ; they browsed perpetually upon the shrubs, and indeed some made themselves ill. Our doctor had unfortunately not foreseen these cases of gluttony on the part of proverbially abstemious animals, nor the unpleasant consequences of them. We followed *Wadi-Delâga* and *Aïn Réisin* between two white walls formed by the natural bed of a torrent. The rocks were covered

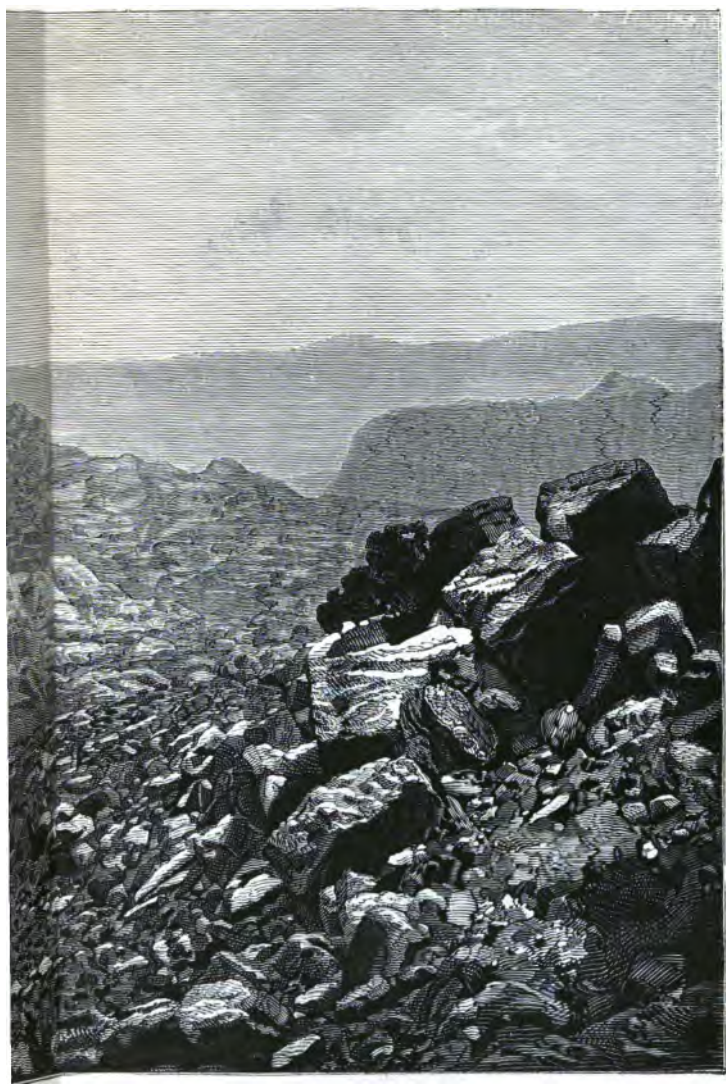
with plants, shrubs, and bushes, and peopled with partridges. Our sportsmen slew great hecatombs of them, to the increased glory of the Swedish *pot-au-feu*. At every turn in the ravine we met large flocks, apparently left altogether to themselves ; and horses, which interested us much, especially the superb mares accompanied by their foals. One of our party could not resist his desire to purchase a very handsome beast which appeared very willing to join our caravan, but the difficulty was to find the proprietors, of whom we had not seen a solitary specimen, though we had passed innumerable studs. We did not perceive them, but no doubt they were there, for it is the habit of the faithful shepherds in that part of the world to hide behind the rocks, in order to spy out travellers, and rob them, if possible. These numerous horses, which seem to roam about abandoned, are all numbered, and when one is missing, his proprietor's tribe will rise *en masse*, to find it, or, if necessary, to demand it by force of arms. Stealing animals constitutes a perpetual occupation in this country, and maintains unpleasant relations between the tribes, who are constantly re-stealing them. At our previous station, the Arabs of our escort had presented to us one of their friends, a

shepherd, who was known to be the most skilful thief in the country. In their eyes, he was a great personage, and they showed him the profound admiration which they always experience for the author of a cleverly executed surprise or theft. One more day of pebbles and dust-heaps, and we shall be able to study these remarkable specimens of the industrial classes at our ease. Most likely we shall have to appreciate them very practically, and to leave them pledges of our approbation. No doubt all the coffee and sugar in our possession are destined to remain in their hands, and we had better not complain, lest they should keep ourselves into the bargain.





GENERAL VIEW



AL VIEW OF PETRA.

SKETCH XV.

PETRA. A MONOLITHIC CITY.

The Sik—Pharaoh's Treasury—The Theatre—'Saint Sulpice before Letters'—Antiques in rags—Nossar—Kelb—Scheik of Wadi-Mouça—The Farewell of Judas, and the Moment of Departure.

IT was three o'clock in the afternoon. The *wadi* through which we were travelling partook of the imperceptible ascent which had for several days been leading us to an extraordinary height above the level of the sea. As yet, nothing led us to think that we were approaching a town, and we were beginning to doubt the skill of our guides, when we found ourselves unexpectedly in the presence of a wonderful spectacle.

Beneath us lay the whole city of Petra. Mount Hor, and the mountain-chains attached to it, spread themselves out like a vision of beauty ; while beyond them the white line of the desert pressed upon them, like the sea when its waters lap gigantic precipices.

Notwithstanding my moderate liking for bird's-eye views, I could not resist a feeling of intense admiration, shared by the whole caravan, for this magnificent sight. The escarped mountains of Petra are very peculiar. They are formed of a dark red earth, which is very friable, and resembles lava in a state of fusion. From the point where we were, we could not as yet distinguish the buildings or the monuments in the city; but we were able to perceive its exceptional site. This block of granite, entirely surrounded by ravines and precipices, is a natural fortress, defended by the mere form of the mountain, from which it seems to have been cut out.

Its Latin name, Petra, or 'stone,' applies perfectly to a town whose houses, temples, and monuments are nothing but blocks of the rocks, cut into, or divided from one another, by man's handiwork.

It is a *monolithic city*: an immense block, just calculated to tempt the Romans, who sought the curious, much more eagerly than the beautiful, in the manifestations of their power.

The enterprise which they carried through, by dint of patience and will, was no less than the cutting of an entire town out of a mountain. There, as everywhere, the objects they proposed to themselves were

the conquering of difficulties, the subduing of matter, and the braving of the elements, and they attained them, in spite of art and taste, always secondary considerations with this engineering people.

The master masons of the universe were not, however, so disinterested as they seemed to be. That they might utilise a mountain which offered such favourable conditions was not a sufficient motive to attract them across the sands of the desert: their ambition and their interest overruled their love of construction; and if Petra presents an assemblage of extraordinary monuments, it is because its strategical importance justified the extravagant cost of its decoration.

Petra formed a point of junction for the Romans between the boundaries of Arabia, Egypt, and India. At an epoch at which Rome pretended to the possession of the whole world and its dependencies, it is very natural that Rome should have wished to place an advanced guard at Petra, as a rallying point between her possessions in the far East and the province of Egypt. We must look back to the epoch of Roman conquest in Asia to understand the importance of Petra in the map of the Roman dominions, and for an explanation of those strange ruins, which have

no more to do with modern geography than the sites of Nineveh and Babylon. Gigantic remains of still greater empires and peoples, they have been respected by time, in order that history may be better able to read the past, and so enable us to touch the power of those ancient people with our hand—power and people so much loftier than our small, self-satisfied civilization can boast.

Who are the modern people who could found cities of such importance in these days? For Petra was a Roman city, which settled itself down in the East, not as a temporary immigrant, but as a lesser Rome itself, with its temples, its theatres, its forum, and its indestructible tombs. This city, lost in the desert, remained for an immense time absolutely unknown, and it is only at distant intervals that its name recurs in the history of the world. M. de Laborde has collected all the precise information respecting it which can be procured. The origin of Petra must have been long anterior to the Roman occupation; and before the existence of the monuments which are so much admired at present, the city was the capital of an important little kingdom, and a kind of central place of repair for the great nations

who shared the East among them, and whom the Romans wished to annex.

Moses is the first writer by whom this locality is mentioned. In the fourteenth chapter of Genesis he speaks of the dwellers in the mountains of Sûr as being *Horites* (dwellers in grottoes). In Deuteronomy, and in the book of Jeremiah, the site and nature of the *grottoes* occupied by the Horites, and afterwards by the people of Edom, are clearly defined by the prophet. He returns to the subject several times, making mention of the mountains which now form the amphitheatre of Petra. In the book of Kings, the city of Sela, the capital of the Edomites, corresponds to this topographical situation.

It is not until three centuries after Christ that we find the name Petra employed by the Greeks and Romans. Diodorus indicates it as the capital of the kingdom of the Nabatheans, who had expelled the Edomites from it. This substitution took place in the fourth or fifth century before our era. Strabo considered Petra an important point of junction between Babylon and Egypt, and it was only a century before Christ that Artemidorus gave a very positive description of the country, and of the wealth

of the city, which he designates by the name which it bears until this day.

Aretas, king of the Nabatheans, was, it appears, very powerful, and he intervened in so positive a fashion in the affairs of Judæa, that he drew down upon himself a first expedition on the part of the Romans, in consequence of having given his opinion too freely at a public meeting. He contrived to turn aside this threatening storm, worthy ancestor as he was of the scheiks of the present time, by dexterous platitudes; but, shortly after, at the time of the expedition of Ælius Gallus into Arabia, Petra fell definitively into the power of the Romans. They installed there, in the first instance, a post of observation, which was soon to become a colony. At a later period Pliny describes the commercial wealth of Petra, which justified the cost of buildings and decorations which we admire there at this day. It was in the year 103 of our era, under the reign of Trajan, that the Nabathean kingdom was officially annexed to the Empire. Thenceforth, the fortunes of Petra were closely united to the different phases of the Roman power. A simple unit in the catalogue of their possessions, Petra disappeared with the Romans, and fell into utter oblivion.

Wadi Mouça was occasionally mentioned by some authors at the epoch of the Crusades, but it was not, until 1812 that the learned Burckhardt discovered, as we may say afresh, the ruins of Petra. M. de Laborde's description gives a complete narrative of all that history and archæology have been able to substantiate respecting these monuments, which are so strangely interpreted by the tribes of the country. The works of Robinson, Irby, and Mangles fully confirm his learned commentaries. I cannot attempt more than a general description of the edifices which struck us most forcibly, less by the purity than the strangeness of their architecture.

Generally speaking, all the buildings, decorations, and sculptures in Petra belong to Roman art of a purely decorative character; and a striking analogy exists between these edifices and the mural paintings which adorn the ruins of Pompeii. They recall that fanciful architecture of the decadence, in which, by the indescribable mingling of all the orders, the Greek style loses its natural simplicity and grandeur in a useless exaggeration of tasteless sculptures and decorations. To define the style of Petra, it is necessary to coin the word Greek-Renaissance.

With the eager haste of children to see all that was

to be seen, we dismounted from our dromedaries, which had to make a wide circuit in order to reach the town, —got down to the bottom of the ravine, and so shortened the period of anticipation. When we reached the end, we found ourselves on the border of a sparkling stream, shaded by magnificent laurels, as large as ordinary full-grown trees ; and there we ought to have awaited the arrival of our animals, and especially of the dragoman, who had enjoined us to caution. Because of the unpromising dispositions of the natives, he wished to make an imposing entry in close order, and to pass his caravan in review from time to time. As usual, our arrival had been signalled, and when we had gone on a little farther, we found ourselves confronted by two Bedouins of the country, who, being armed with long guns, pistols, and knives, did not inspire us with confidence, so that we met their advances with considerable coldness. As a pretext for conversation, they asked us to buy some grey partridges, but in the absence of our dragoman we observed a studied reserve, and replied politely that we had just been shooting partridges.

At last the caravan came up ; the baggage was collected, and our entry into Petra, the scheik at our head, commenced. We went into the mountain

through so narrow a gorge that we had presently to descend from our dromedaries, in order to avoid breaking our heads against the rocks which hung over us. So close together were the sides of the mountain in this place, that the light of day only reached us through an opening, which it struck obliquely. The half-darkness increased the impressive character of this prolonged cavern.

El Sik—such is the denomination of this fantastic passage—recalls much more forcibly Dante's hell than the grandeur of the Roman Empire. The red colouring of the entire mountain completes this impression, and Orpheus would not be misplaced in the ravine. The Arabs directed our attention, at the entrance of this grim gorge, to an arch which was flung boldly over the passage. This construction is purely decorative, it serves no purpose, and unites only inaccessible rocks. We remarked twelve niches, which had once doubtless contained twelve little statues, but Islamism has religiously suppressed them, with all other representations of the human form which had existed in the different monuments in the city.

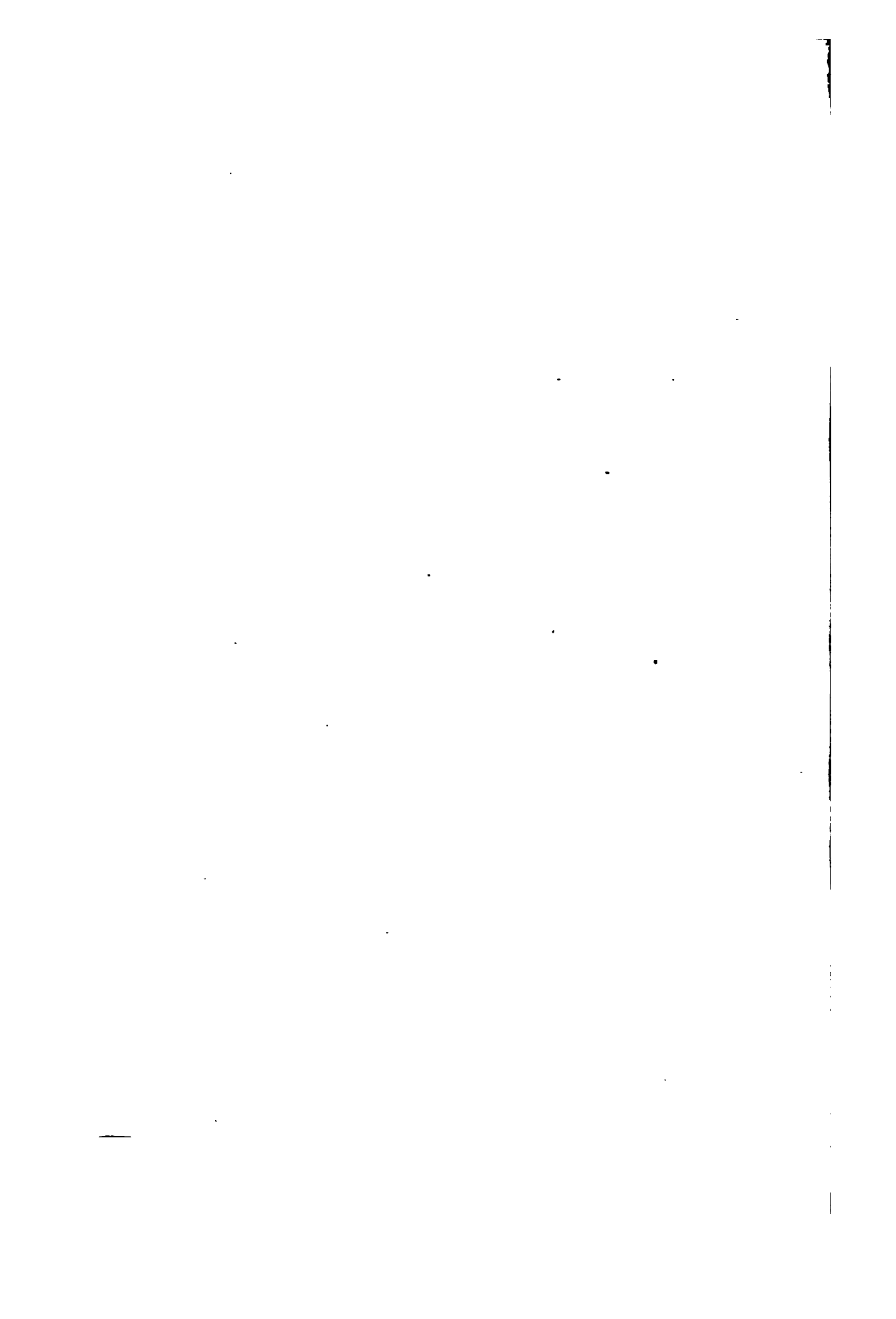
During our journey through this curious place, we recognised traces of several Roman buildings—

among others, the remains of an aqueduct cut in the thickness of the wall, and which ought, by conducting the waters of *Ain Mouça* to the centre of the town, to leave the ravine dry. But the aqueduct is in ruins, and we had to walk in the water. We were divided between our admiration for this marvellous place, and the painful contortions of our bruised ankles, when, having followed this defile for about half an hour, a most unexpected apparition burst upon our astonished gaze. An entire temple stood before us, lighted as if by a jet of red electric flame. It was the first which we had seen, and it is decidedly the most interesting of all the edifices in Petra. It is called *Khasneh Fir-oum*—or Pharaoh's Treasure House, though its Corinthian architecture leaves no doubt concerning its origin; but everything architectural in the East is attributed to an Egyptian Pharaoh.

The entire building is hewn in one piece from the red face of the rock, and is a temple, in two stories, with a façade, surmounted by a small circular pavilion ornamented with columns. The dome is crowned by a massive urn, in which the Arabs believe that a treasure is contained. The marks of many balls indicate their fruitless attempts to dis-



THE GREAT ROMAN TEMPLE AT PETRA.



place the inoffensive lump of stone, to which they cannot climb, for lack of the necessary scaffolding.

Judging by the façade, the interior of the temple ought to be very large, but this is a deception. The lower door gives access to a small square apartment with niches. It is too small for a temple and too large for a tomb. On the other hand, were these buildings left unfinished? That is very possible, for in several places the sculptures are only in the first stage of rough chiselling.

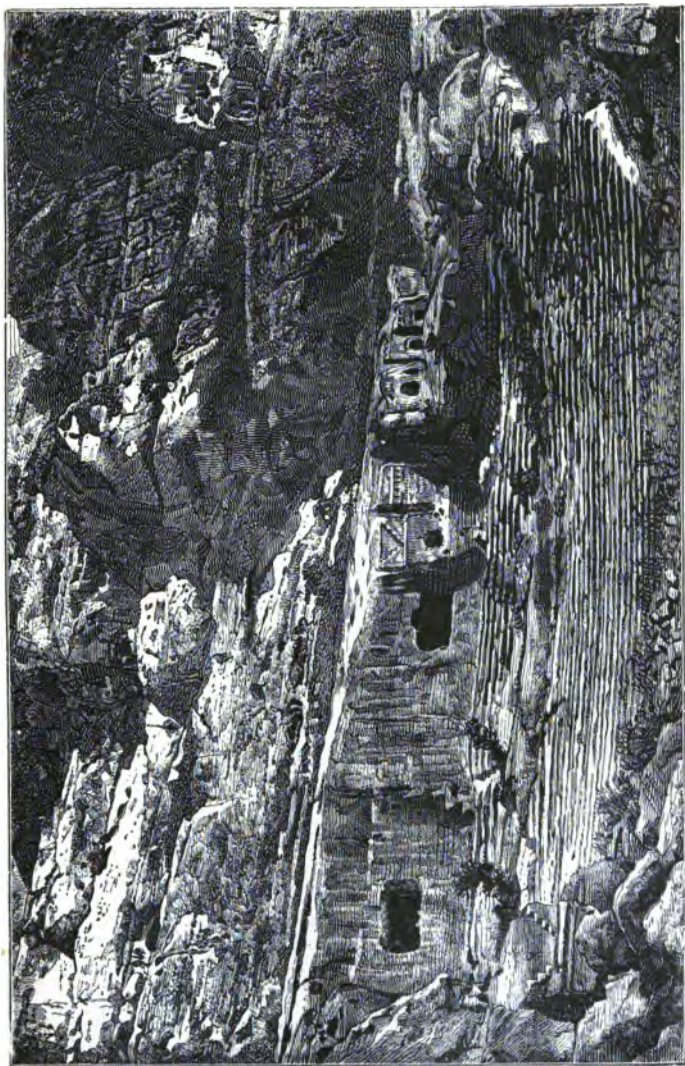
The greater part of the decorations closely resemble those of Balbek, and certain authors consider that these monuments, so distant from each other, were built at one and the same epoch.

M. de Laborde, however, has pointed out a Greek inscription, which would relegate the existence of a portion of these buildings to a much anterior period. This inscription is on the frontal of one of the tombs in front of the great theatre. We went to see it, but it is nearly effaced. We were sorely tempted to replace it ; but we were afraid it would bring some misfortune upon us, if we did so, and contented ourselves with carving certain hieroglyphs, which will puzzle the Champollions of the future. Two days,

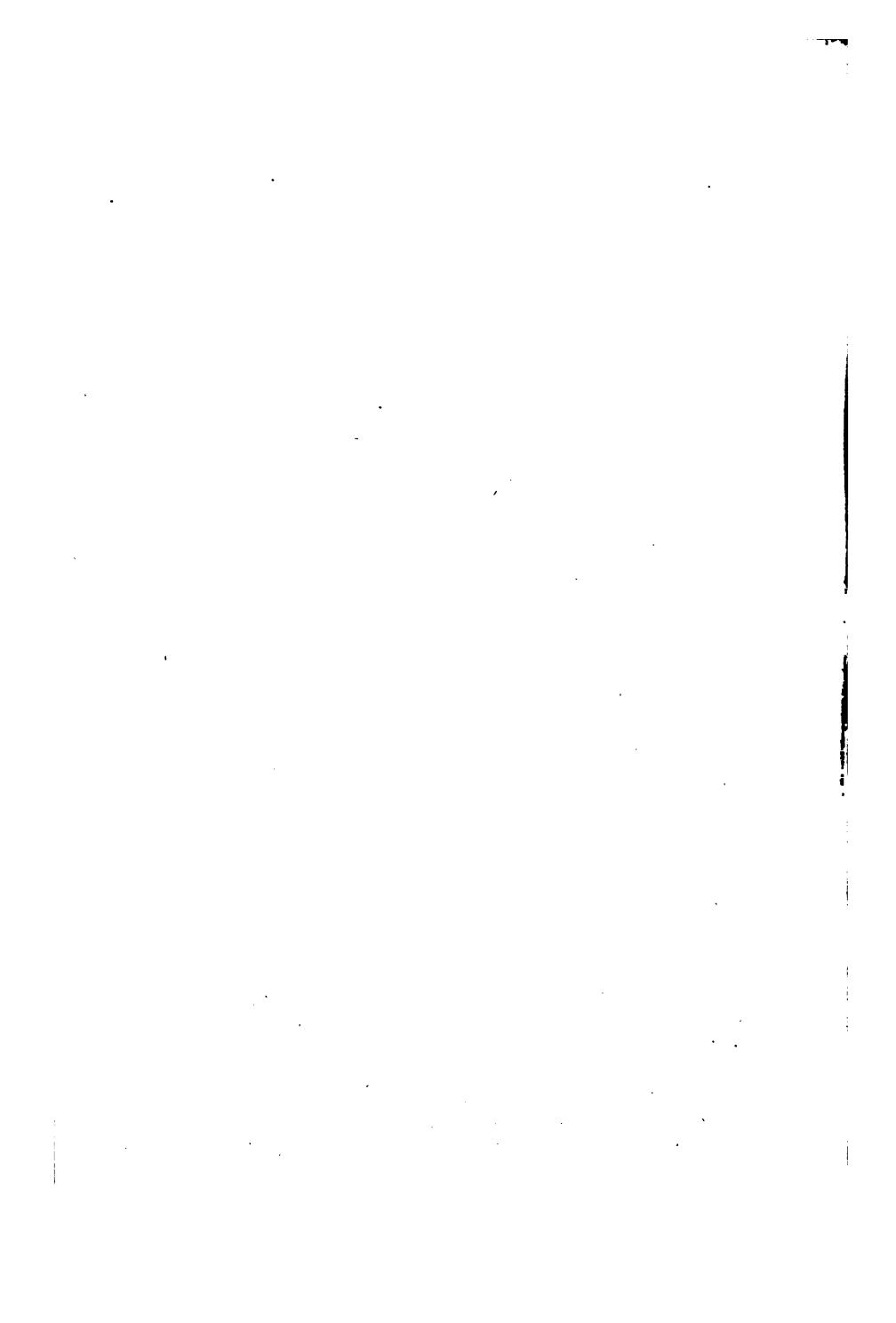
during which it rained in torrents, gave us ample leisure to perform these works of art.

Four months later, I chanced to be at Damascus, and to find myself in company with certain learned travellers who, having just come from Petra, had been much puzzled and annoyed by the pictures which we had left behind us. Of course I loudly joined in their indignant reprobation of such sacrilege. Our intentions were not evil, and, after all, what had we done?—we had made their way easy for future travellers, by painting hands holding arrows, at all the crossings and alleys. The complicated windings of the city we divided into sections and quarters, ‘Wadi Mouffetard, Guignol Square,’ &c. The names shone in the brightest vermilion and were accompanied by bold profiles of the principal scheiks of the country.

In front of the temple of Pharaoh’s Treasure the gorge divides suddenly into two wider branches; that which we took was literally choked with immense rose-laurels, which were like flowering trees. This circuit brought us out on the theatre, which was entirely hollowed out of the mountain, like the other buildings. The orchestra measures thirty-five yards in diameter, and the thirty-three rows of benches



PETRA: THE ROMAN THEATRE.



which formed the amphitheatre for spectators can still be traced.

In this place we found a great number of sepulchral grottoes cut out in the rock, whose dimensions and situation have led some persons to think that such symmetrical apertures were nothing but the principal boxes in the theatre, places reserved for distinguished personages ; but the existence of similar grottoes in the rest of the town destroys this hypothesis. The grottoes were simply dwellings ornamented with windows, which are still visible, and whose existence is much anterior to the construction of the great monuments in their vicinity.

We left the theatre, and, having climbed a long series of steps in a ruinous condition, on the left, we reached the tombs, whose architecture is very characteristic. Their form is that of truncated cones, so that the façade of each looks like a pyramid laid into the face of the mountain. The effect of the whole is that of a series of wardrobes placed atop of each other, rather than a monumental façade. On quitting these sculptured boxes, and again passing before the theatre, we followed the valley, which, gradually widening, would lead us to the forum, the central spot of the Roman city, and surrounded by

the chief buildings. This is the place usually chosen by the dragomans for pitching camps ; and there, in mud and damp, our tents were raised, and sustained a siege by all the population, who crowded to see us, and especially to live at our expense ; for very soon we had a terrible repetition of the orgies of Abakah, and the colossal gluttony of Mohammed Gadd.

All the scheiks in the country were under arms, in expectation of our arrival, and, like a flight of crows, they swooped down upon us before the camel-drivers had had time to unload our camels, and set up our tents.

The reception was brilliant, touching, and highly meritorious on the part of our chief, who, having publicly committed himself to respect and admiration for these gentry, had to accept their embraces without wincing.

First came the scheik of Petra, Nossar himself ; then the scheik of Wadi Mouça ; then a procession of scheiks of all the *wadis* in the district, each more powerful, more terrible, and especially more dirty than his predecessor. We recognised among the crowd of evil faces some of those pleasant guests who had gorged themselves at the expense of our canteens at Abakah. They knew the way to the kitchen, and a raid on our provisions was speedily organised. An

English party, the same whom we had already met, were installed before us, and we served to divert the ardour of pillage from them. The information which they had to give us respecting the locality and its inhabitants was not too cheerful. They went off next day, leaving us to ourselves, or rather to the tender mercies of our hosts.

In order to intimidate us and to try our mettle, these worthy Bedouins got up among themselves a mock battle over a barrel of water for the camp, which our dragoman had sent for. The carrier demanded ten francs, and the proprietor of the barrel insisted upon receiving a similar sum. Swords were drawn, guns were fired furiously, and discordant cries made the whole town ring. Confident in our guns and in our revolvers, we displayed a perfect indifference to this pretended row,—the trick was detected, and they instantly subsided into silence. The little comedy was very amusing, but it lasted rather too long, for it was not until nightfall that they were really convinced of the failure of their attempt at terrorism.

They left us in peace for several days, which we conscientiously employed in studying the principal sites in the place. The space once occupied by

the forum is overhung on all sides by the mountains, which turn it into an inaccessible den, and the Sik, which we had followed, is a very unpromising road by which to attempt a surprise of this brigands' cavern. There we found great numbers of those curious, sculptured niches, merely decorative, with nothing to account for them; for they are only exterior, and do not serve as entrances to any excavations worth mentioning.

Coming down on the left, in the direction of *Aïn Mouça*, we were struck by a great building which stands out alone, in much larger proportions and in a much more sober style of decoration than any of the others. This is *Kassr-Fir-oum*, Pharaoh's Castle, of course, though this building is more Roman than the others, in its massiveness and all its details. Its walls are at least two yards and a half thick, which gives it an extraordinary, invincible solidity. In the interior we could trace the marks of beams, which indicate the different stories of which the edifice was composed. The tranquil lines of the huge building are quite refreshing to the eye, which becomes fatigued by the meaningless twists of the others.

It is a traditional legend in the country that the Romans concealed considerable treasure in Petra, and the

Arabs display the greatest avidity in vain searching for it. I made several architectural studies here, and, though I am a great admirer of the Greek style, I could not extend my admiration to these huge senseless playthings.

We had still to see a number of tombs and temples—some unfinished, others in ruins—which were so cleverly hidden in the rocks from which they are formed, that we could not have discovered them without the aid of our horrible guides, and, even with that aid, had considerable difficulty in getting at them.

A finer collection of robbers' caves could not be imagined, and if Cartouche had wished to found a community of his brethren, he would have found here a country naturally adapted to their education. Among the numerous tombs which we came upon, in following the course of *Aïn Mouça*, was one which deserves special mention. On its front it bears a Latin inscription, in good preservation, in which it is easy to read the name *Florentinus*. This functionary, dead at his post, interested us, and his gay-sounding name contrasted strangely with the terrible desolation of his last dwelling.

After a conscientious inspection of a crowd of

similar tombs, in which every kind of architecture had a share of the general ruin, we held a council with our Arabs, concerning a proposed ascent which was of a fatiguing kind. It was decided upon, however, and we climbed one of the most considerable buildings in Petra, which is also, in virtue of its indefinable architecture, decidedly the ugliest. This is the convent called *El Deir*, which reminded us all instantly and simultaneously of St. Sulpice. The resemblance between these two edifices is very singular. If there had only been a fountain with lions we should have felt ourselves carried by enchantment into the heart of *the sixth Arrondissement*.

As the *Suisse* was not there, we walked very disrespectfully into this sanctuary; breakfasted on the steps of the temple, and amused ourselves by throwing stones at the nests of the owls and bats, which are the sole tenants of this desolate and disenchanting palace. Persons who like bird's-eye views may enjoy the panorama of a series of huge mountain peaks, over which Mount Hor towers like a giant.

We were particularly struck by the stairs, dug in the rock, and which are in a wonderful state of preservation throughout the whole ascent. Enormous

green and blue lizards were warming themselves in the sun, and hid themselves at our approach.

Having accomplished this investigation, we were not again tempted to stray from the forum and other central monuments of the town. On the southern side there is a curious solitary column, standing quite alone, in the midst of a waste of remains, and it also is called after Pharaoh.

Many slight indications concurred to render our stay at Petra disquieting, and to make it evident that the situation was growing critical. Our relations with Scheik Nossar were becoming complicated, and we were thinking seriously of being off. For some days the exactions of our friends and brethren had become intolerable to us and to our unfortunate cook. After having exhausted our canteens, these estimable robbers went so far as to sleep within the pickets of our tents. The inconvenience and unpleasantness of their vicinity inspired us with stratagems worthy of Ulysses, but unhappily of little avail. Every evening they disturbed us with their interminable conversations, which lasted far into the night; and the forum being full of echoes, we had but little chance of sleep.

One night, when their conference had been more

exasperating than ever, I called to one of them, whose strident voice we knew only too well. We called him Agamemnon; and on this occasion I added a strong epithet to the appellation. To my surprise the Arab repeated very distinctly the three concluding words of my highly-coloured phrase. The astonishing clearness of the echo tempted me to try again, with similar success.

'I,' said I—'I,' repeated the Arab.

'Am,'—'am,' said the echo.

'A rascal!'—'a rascal!'—'a robber!'—'a robber!'

'I have'—'I have'—'assassinated'—'assassinated'—'my father'—'my father.' 'I have hanged my uncle,' &c., &c.; and so on through a list of horrors at which Œdipus would have shuddered.

Our human parrot repeated each syllable with the nicest exactness, and threw an energy into the performance which delighted the whole camp. If his memory be equal to his pronunciation, he will probably scandalise the travellers of the future by the range and vigour of his slang.

Contemplating these types of mankind, who must be as utterly devoid of any charm in their private as in their public life, I often wondered what the female companions of these mere brutes could be.

One day an accident enabled me to see one of them in her national costume.

It was on the edge of *Ain Mouça*, under the cool shade of superb rose-laurels in full flower. I was busily engaged in cleaning my palette and brushes, when the sound of branches being pushed aside, just behind me, made me turn my head quickly. Through the surrounding branches I saw a water-pot; and, in the East, who sees a water-pot, must soon see a woman. Acting on this well-known rule, I looked more closely, and I saw a small, plump hand, with nails carefully painted, according to the detestable Arab custom. This hand, so small, so pretty, attracted me, and I was advancing discreetly, so as to get a sight of its owner, when I suddenly started back, in horror and dismay, having found myself face to face with the most hideous apparition my imagination could conceive.

Over the face of this indefinable creature was placed a mask, made of the skin of some kind of beast. Two holes were cut for eyes, and an artificial mouth, almost immediately under them, was painted on the livid surface with a hideous grimace. To crown the ugliness of the mask, a wig of horsehair was braided into a horn upon the forehead, and into two huge puffs

over the ears. A more hideous combination could not have been put together, and it seemed to me like a nightmare; nevertheless, the monster before my eyes was certainly a woman, perhaps young and pretty, judging by her hands. But if she had been Madame Nossar Scheik in person, I must have turned and run away, as I did without an instant's delay, as if from the devil himself. Dog's ears, unicorn's horn, skin masks—such are the singular accessories of Bedouin coquetry, which no doubt aims at terrifying travellers, as scarecrows frighten sparrows from cherries.

SKETCH XVI.

LEAVING PETRA.

Real Brigands—A Critical Moment—Projects of Vengeance—Wadi Arabah and an Ocean of Flowers—Bedouin Thieves—A Second-hand Hebron—‘Partant pour la Syrie’—Good-bye for a while.

WE were to start on the following day—a prospect which filled us with delight. We perfectly understood the eagerness which our English friends had displayed to get away from this den of thieves; and we were making preparations to follow their example. Though our tents were very damp, we had them packed at early morning upon the camels, and the dragoman organised the baggage in detachments, which we followed in parties; so as to watch over, and, if necessary, to defend it. According to the agreement we had made, Scheik Nossar was to accompany us to the limits of the first defile beyond the city, not that he might do us honour, but in order to protect us against the Bedouins, who had made their plans to

follow us, and who would seize upon the first opportunity of robbing us, after having led us into a snare of some kind.

At the last moment the scheik refused his escort, protesting that his horse was done up; but, upon the imperious order of our chief, he resigned himself to accompany us, though with manifest ill-will; and the other scheiks, fully armed, who came with him as his Staff, seemed to entertain by no means amiable intentions with regard to us. How did it happen that we were so unpopular with these people, to whom we had given over our canteens, and whom we had paid liberally, according to their own tariff, for the privilege of travelling in their country? The explanation is very simple. The bakshish which they would have considered sufficient if given by ordinary travellers, was not sufficient as coming from us; for these, worthy robbers had estimated us according to the superb dromedaries belonging to the Viceroy, on which we had ridden to Abakah, and which we had so regretfully exchanged for the wretched camels of Mohammed Gadd. 'As are the beasts, so are the riders,'—such is the argument of these pillagers, who value you, and fix your ransom accordingly; therefore

they required a supplementary bakshish, in honour of our dignified coursers.

Scheiks, shepherds, Bedouins of every kind, obstinately insisted on getting more money. They escorted each of our unhappy camels, in crowds, and seemed inclined to oppose their progress. On a gesture of one of the scheiks they might have shut the road against us, and not the most heroic resistance could have availed. Our lives must have been all lost, for they could have killed our dragoman, to begin with, and our entire ignorance of the way through these impracticable gorges and precipices would have rendered a struggle quite hopeless.

The storm was gathering behind us, and about to break.

Nossar, the Scheik of Petra, dismounted from his horse, and, lance in hand, advancing to our chief, gave him to understand that he demanded more money. Gérôme simply drew out his purse, and, smiling, showed him that it was quite empty. The scheik was petrified with astonishment. He had been prepared for everything but this. His amazement was such that he stood with his mouth wide open, and his lance upright and motionless. Our chief finished him by calmly taking off his own cloak and offering it

to him. Then, if Nossar had not been held up by his boots, he must have sunk down.

But the game was not played out. The scheik, having returned from his mission discomfited, had to endure the reproaches of his friends and brethren, who held that he had ill fulfilled the 'imperative mandate' which had been entrusted to him.

No doubt they said he was a traitor, a good-for-nothing, and had been sold ; for the cries and expostulations of his respectable Staff reached our ears, and inspired us with just apprehensions for our own safety. We had not long to await the result. We had reached the limits of Petra ; heaps of symmetrical stones marked the boundary of the scheik's territory, and we had already exchanged most hypocritical adieux with the band of robbers, when, as we turned from them, we perceived that two of the party had gone on ahead, in the same direction as ourselves, and were barring the way with their lances.

- We did not immediately understand this manœuvre, but, the moment we passed before these two horsemen, one of them, the nephew of Scheik Nossar, threw back his cloak, and showed the barrel of an enormous pistol pointed towards our dragoman ; who had not time even to draw his

sword. But already three of our revolvers were turned upon the traitor.

The moment was very exciting, for a gesture too much might ruin all. The young scheik no doubt understood his personal danger, for he withdrew his pistol, and galloped away. Our moderation saved us, for, if one of us had yielded to the strong temptation to blow this brigand's brains out, the shot would have been the signal for a general engagement, in which all the disadvantage must have been on our side, notwithstanding the long range of our guns.

We might, indeed, have killed the scheiks who were there, within our reach, but the firing would have been heard, and we should have had several whole tribes down upon us. In these impracticable defiles, they would have killed us with stones without any difficulty, and we congratulated ourselves, with good reason, upon the coolness which had enabled us to refrain from instant vengeance.

We descended the mountain warily and quietly, but we took an energetic leave, at a safe distance, of the wretches from whom we had escaped.

'Adieu, you rascals!' we said. 'Adieu, you thieves, murderers, and ruffians. With your straw pistols, and your wooden swords, if it were not for your roads

and your mountains, we could make mincemeat of you!' At that moment our ambition was to return to Petra at some future day, and exterminate these banditti to the last man.

The attempt had already been made, but every time anything like a strong force has appeared in the country, there was no one to be found. The nomadic tribes fly away, to reappear when people get tired of looking for them. Under Ibrahim Pasha they received a considerable sum of bribery money, which rendered them less exacting to travellers, and also with regard to the caravan for Mecca, which they had occasionally pillaged out of devotion.

The only thing one can wish is that the cholera may sweep the country pretty frequently, and rid it by quick stages of these vermin. We kept a vigilant, mistrusting watch for several hours, and accelerated our march as much as possible. At length, when we had accomplished one half of our descent, the road became more practicable, and we felt ourselves drawing near to the plain, where these savages would never have the audacity to attack us.

The little incidents which had attended our departure from Petra, were not calculated to increase our sense of the picturesque in the white chalk gorges

and *wadis*, through which we passed as quickly as possible, without the least desire to sojourn among them. At length we came into *Wadi Arabah*, which is very wide; whereas the others are extremely narrow. It is in fact a plain, where wild and tangled plants and shrubs grow in great profusion. Not far from our camp three wells produced very dirty water, in which the camels and Arabs rejoiced hugely, while we had to fall back upon our wine, which had already consoled us in many misfortunes.

The sandy soil of this district is relieved by a good deal of vegetation, and we saw several flocks of gazelles at a distance, but quite distinctly.

On quitting this vast series of sandhills, we came up with a little caravan, composed of three men and an ass. On the ass rode an old Syrian, a Damascus merchant, who had gone quite alone to sell stuffs to a tribe near Petra, who honoured him with their custom. As his merchandise consisted of a positive necessary of life, the *scheiks*, as he explained to us, were interested in securing his freedom and safety in his journeys. He did very good business, he told us, with these robbers, who paid him with the money which they stole from travellers and caravans.

One of his companions was an Arab, who had been

forgotten *en route* by the Mecca caravan. He had fallen asleep during a halt, and on awaking found that the caravan had gone on. He had succeeded in finding his way back, and had lived on leaves and roots. The third of these singular travellers was a complete savage. He was entirely naked, armed with a huge club, and adorned with a bunch of hair on the extreme top of his skull. He interested us particularly by the smile of utter satisfaction which his face wore perpetually. They begged us to permit them to follow our caravan closely, as a measure of security against the Bedouins. We did not see any objection to their doing so, and it gave us an opportunity of studying three very strange types.

For my part, I formed a strong affection for the gorilla. He permitted me to handle his club, and we swore eternal friendship, with the most extraordinary grimaces. He would run, barefoot, on the burning sand in search of brambles, which he brought for my camel to eat. This was the only thing he could do to please me, and testify his devotion. Unfortunately, I wished to show him that I appreciated his good feeling, and I gave him a *bicholique*, which is a large Arab coin of very little value. I was curious to see what he would do with it; and I certainly meant

well, but the result was disastrous, for hardly had the monster taken the coin into his hand than he rolled his large eyes on every side, to see that he was not observed, and, bounding away across the sands, disappeared. As I did not understand this proceeding, I asked the merchant what it meant, and he explained that the poor wretch had run away, lest any one should take his coin from him, and added that the unfortunate creature, who did not know the road, would, no doubt, lose his way, and die of hunger in some hole. My careless action and its probable sad result made me very melancholy, and we also regretted my savage, because he was such a curiosity. He neither ate nor drank, and yet he was fat, and he laughed incessantly.

At length we got out of *Wadi Arabah*, which looks like the vast dry basin of an inland sea. The immense arid desert plain is burned up by a dry ever-blowing wind.

The mountain which we now had to cross was in form like an immense sloping roof, which our camels climbed with very great difficulty. They were forced to make a long round, which caused us to lose half a day. We ourselves had boldly commenced the ascent of this vast inclined wall, but, as usual, our eyes had

mistaken the distance, and, the higher we climbed, the farther we seemed to be from the top. It was trying, especially as our shoes were cut to pieces in a very short time.

Like slaters on a house-top, we stopped from time to time to breathe, and watch each other climbing up ; and sometimes we waited for one another,—and it was extremely hard work. But *labor omnia vincit improbus*, and we arrived at last, only to find, however, that we had, through some unaccountable carelessness, omitted to bring any food with us. Not until five hours later could we assuage the pangs of hunger, which had been excited by this climb on all-fours. We remounted our dromedaries, and began to admire the immense panorama which displayed itself beneath, and all around us. First we beheld Wadi Arabah in all its length, then the gigantic mass of the mountains of Petra, crowned by Hor ; on our right, the white line of the sands of the desert of *Tih* ; on our left, the wondrous chains of *Ghor*, which stretch far away out of sight, to the Dead Sea.

This was the last comprehensive view of the arid Arabian desert which we were to enjoy ; we were now about to bid adieu to the inhospitable waste, and to enter upon new ground.

In fact we had hardly quitted the plateau when we found ourselves in the midst of green meadows, where we observed some attempts at furrows, and a faint imitation of culture. Trees were few, but everywhere we observed an inconceivable profusion of wild flowers. Our camels seemed as if they did not know what to make of such unexpected vegetable wealth, and almost as if they were suspicious of it. Our beasts sank nearly to their knees in the tall grass, and we were surrounded for a long distance by a perfect ocean of flowers, which, swaying on their stems, seemed to bid us a European welcome.

But, if we were gainers by the change in the nature of the soil and the vegetation, so much could not be said of the temperature, for we were assailed by an icy and damp wind, which was very unpleasant, though rather like home too.

Countless flocks of goats and little black sheep detached themselves like moving islands from this sea of pasture. A child and a dog were frequently the only guardians of these thousands of animals, whose bleating sounded from afar like the noise of an army on the march.

At length the mountains of Syria reared their heads before us. Yet a few days, and we should find

bread and fresh water at Hebron, while we awaited at Jerusalem our letters from France. For two months the post had had no business to do for us, and no words could describe the impatience with which we longed for news after so long an interruption of communications. Our minds were so full of anticipation that we hardly enjoyed so much as we ought to have done the novelty and beauty of the country through which we were travelling.

The mountains on our left were entirely draped in green, the flocks were defined upon their sides in long black patches ; but we were most vividly interested in the encampment of the Bedouin Arabs, the proprietors of these rich grazing grounds.

Thousands of tents clustered together, looking like a sea of motionless waves ; and the brown colouring, striped with black, of these coarse stuffs increased the strange appearance of these immense *douars*, whence arose occasionally a little smoke, and the barking of dogs. We saw few Arabs, but then we had already had quite enough of them, and the peaceful shepherds of this Arcadia faithfully preserve the tradition of skilful pillaging, in common with their brethren of Petra.

Scheik Mak Boul, who was to accompany us to

Hebron, expressed his distrust of these gentry, and urged us not to go to any distance from the camp, notwithstanding the inoffensive manner of the shepherds whom we met.

This flowery land only requires gendarmes, to be perfect ; but even then, I should not establish myself here.

The fears with which our scheik was troubled soon received substantial justification. Two of our party, notwithstanding the sage counsel of the dragoman, were so imprudent as to go on too far in front, and were quickly punished for their rashness.

It was about five in the afternoon, and the day was declining, when, at the turn of a narrow road, my companion and I found ourselves confronted by three tall fellows, armed to the teeth, who planted themselves across the path, and imperiously demanded money. The position was a critical one ; we had to avoid becoming the victims of these new brigands, and to give the rest of our caravan time to rejoin us.

On the challenge of the three men, my friend and I began looking at each other, and placing our hands quite naturally on our inseparable and excellent revolvers, but here, as at Petra, it was quite clear that the three apes before us were not the only enemies

we should have to deal with, and that the first shot fired would bring a whole troop down upon us. Our escort was not far off, but still it would take some time to come up. This second case of 'stand and deliver' appeared to us excessively droll, and, far from frightening us, it amused us extremely.

'*They are shepherds!*' cried my companion; 'we must soften their hearts by gentle poesy. Speak soft words to them!'

'So be it,' thought I. 'I'll make them a speech; it can't do harm, and it may do good.' Accordingly I drew myself up on the saddle of my camel, like a deputy in the tribune, saluted them profoundly, and addressed them in the following terms:

'Gentlemen brigands, gentlemen assassins,—

'This affair is very simple. You are three, and we are only two. And yet it is not so conclusive, because we could empty our revolvers into your stomachs, before you could know where you are! But soon all your estimable families would hurry to the scene—we know they are not far off—and we therefore prefer to tell you stories, in order to pass the time until our friends come up.'

Here one of the Arabs, exasperated at our cheerful

demeanour, imperiously repeated his demand for bakshish.

‘Gentlemen brigands, gentlemen assassins,’ I recommenced—

‘Do not give way to anger, or impatience. If you are weary, we will amuse you by reciting “Maître Corbeau.” It is grand, simple, pastoral; just the thing for you.’

Then, enthroned upon my dromedary, I began, with graceful and appropriate gestures—

‘Maître Corbeau, sur un palmier perché
Tenait en son bec un fromage.
Maître Renard . . .’

Happily I had not to finish my fable, for our escort appeared; and this singular affair, which might have had a far different ending, was amicably arranged.

O, La Fontaine! We owe thee our lives! We were saved!

If we could have spared time, it would have been delightful to have bound the three robbers, and brought them alive to Hebron; or indeed, for that matter, to have hanged them ourselves. But we were in too great a hurry to risk any more warlike complications, which might also have exposed our scheik Mak Boul to danger on his return; and we could not play him

such a trick in return for the real services which he had rendered us. We were near our haven, and though the night, which we passed in the mud, was very damp and cold, we never rose in better spirits, or better case. We aroused our sleepy animals by not the most gentle means, for this was the day of our deliverance. We were going to see a real city with real inhabitants.

Our first task was the climbing of several very steep paths to the ruins of Kourmoul—ruins which so well deserve their name that there is nothing at all left of them. The view which the ancient site commands is certainly better worth seeing than any ruins could be.

This marvellous panorama includes almost the whole of Judæa. On our right lay the Dead Sea, and in the distance the mountains of Ghor stretched away to the horizon, beyond Jordan, while before us was the valley of Hebron, with its gardens prettily hung on artificial terraces.

The vegetation was at once more formal and more brilliant. Trees planted in lines, vines well tended, and fields carefully cultivated, rejoiced our eyes, and our hearts; for we knew that we were about to meet human beings who would not accost us, pistol in hand. It gave us profound satisfaction to

observe an Arab—a peasant from a neighbouring village—preparing the ground for seed-sowing. He was the first whom we had seen at work since we left our good city of Medinet-el-Fayoum. We felt inclined to embrace him, and offer him the Montyon prize to encourage him in his work, but he did it so naturally, we knew our congratulations would strike him as ridiculous and uncalled for.

‘Ah, sir, you do not murder! Ah, sir, you are an honest man!’

Such were our spontaneous and affecting salutations. Then we resumed our composure, and devoted ourselves to accelerating the pace of our camels, who did not understand our increased vivacity.

‘Hebron! Hebron! Hebron!’ we cried all at once, on perceiving the walls and the foremost houses of the town. Christopher Columbus did not exclaim ‘Land! Land!’ more joyfully when he discovered the New World.

We were in Syria!

That is to say, we were going to sleep in real beds, to drink clean water, to eat fresh bread, to receive letters, news, and newspapers only two months old. This was quite enough to make us forget the dirty water, the hard bread, the burnt mutton, the insects,

the scorpions, and, above all, the friends and brethren who figure in the great red nightmare which we shall ever remember as Petra.

Partant pour la Syrie, like the young and handsome Dunois !

And Jerusalem ! and Bethlehem ! Nazareth and Damascus ! The less brilliant, the almost melancholy East—less picturesque, it is true, but calmer and more poetic—where one's limbs are less fatigued, but where the heart and the mind have deeper associations, and find more to learn.

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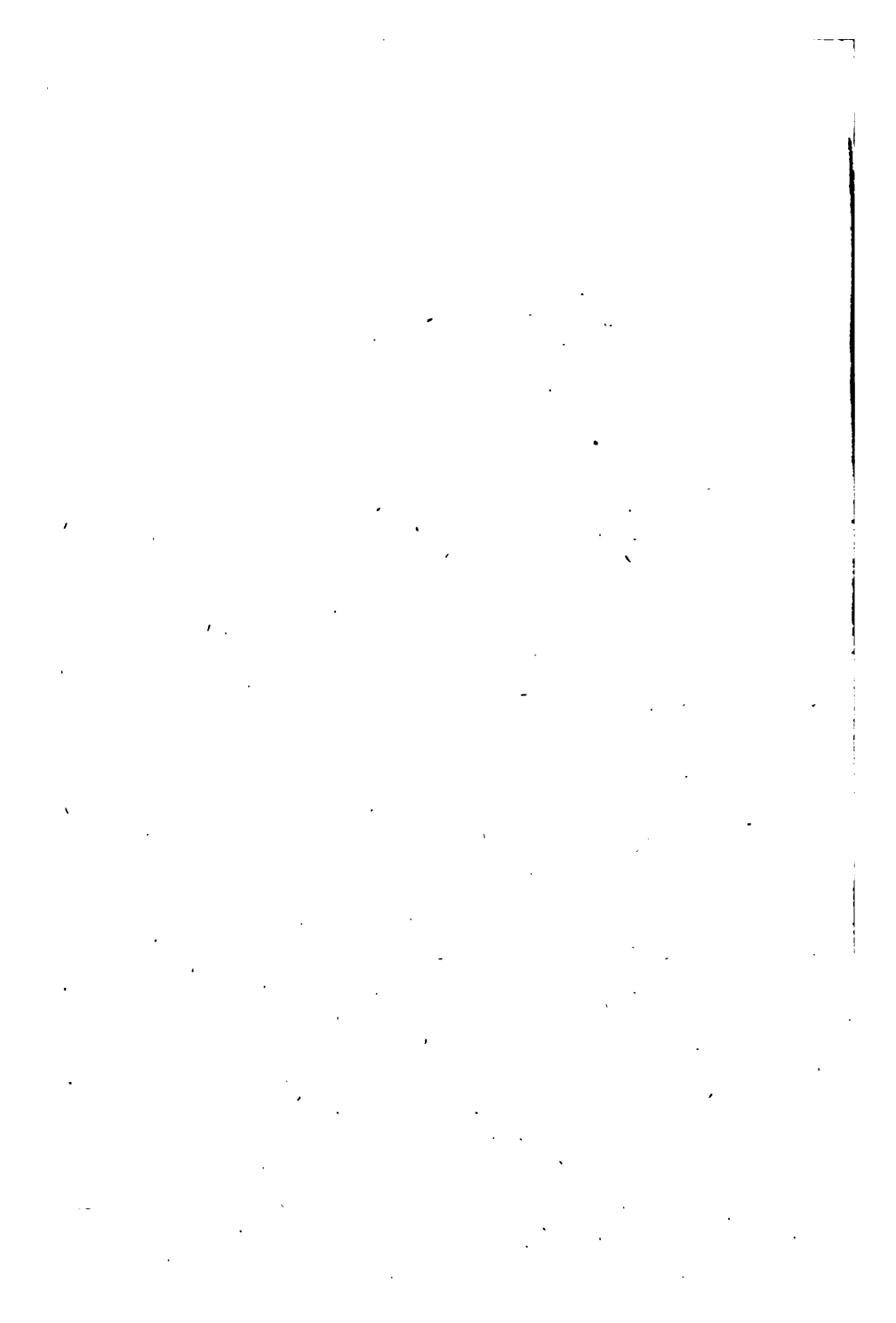
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